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OUIDA'S NEW NOVEL.

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PIPISTRELLO, and other Stories.

By OUIDA.

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

WITH A SILKEN THREAD

ETC.

WITH A SILKEN THREAD

AND OTHER STORIES

BY E. LYNN LINTON

AUTHOR OF

"PATRICIA KEMBALL," "THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS,"
"THE WORLD WELL LOST," "UNDER WHICH LORD?" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

For Love—

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Hast thou found me, O mine Enemy?	3
II.	Muscle and Mind	25
III.	Harold as Hero	47
IV.	In the Gloaming	66
V.	The Serpent in Eden	85
VI.	Truth at any Price	108
VII.	The Wolf and the Lamb	125
VIII.	Unmasked	144
IX.	Forgiven	167

The White Witch of Combe Andrew 183

Galloping Dick 209

The Fate of Madame Cabanel 231

Wild and Tame 259

547509

FOR LOVE.

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CHAPTER I.

HAST THOU FOUND ME, O MINE ENEMY?

It was in the dusk of a dull winter's evening, when business men were hurrying westwards from the city, and fine ladies were driving home from the parks, that Charles Lanfear, leaving the office where he too had been doing his day's work like the rest, turned up the darkening streets to his lodgings in Bloomsbury. He was not a man to attract attention by any outward peculiarity, being just of average condition in most things—in height, in colour, in dress, in bearing—and yet his face, when studied, had in it the signs of a history and a sorrow beyond that which even exceptional men often know. It was a handsome face, and the features were singularly delicate; beautiful in its regularity of outline and the golden tints of hair and beard, yet weak throughout—weak in the smooth receding forehead and the wavering undefined eye-

brows—weak in the small loosely shut lips, in the narrow jaw, the pointed chin, the soft uncurled hair—weak in its very sensitiveness, coupled as this was with indecision and want of courage, showing a man who, how virtuous soever he might be by nature, could yet be used as a tool for evil because he was plastic, affectionate and a coward—one who, if he had not force enough to do wrong on his own account, yet neither would he have strength enough to resist the sin imposed on him by another. It was the face of a man who had no central independence of his own, but who was just what chance and circumstance might choose to make him.

As he passed along the streets with his furtive glancing eyes and restless lips, his body bending forward, his head lowered and his hat drawn well over his brows, slipping past obstructions with his shoulder set back rather than meeting the world broadside as its equal, his whole bearing had on it a painful impress of suspicion and of fear—like one expecting a pursuer and living on dread as on his daily food—like one, too, nervously afraid of giving offence or attracting observation, and asking of the world only the grace of oblivion and disregard.

Walking rapidly now, still with his glancing eyes watching furtively and his shoulder set back, as he threaded his way through the human tangles thronging

the streets, he was met by a jaunty, active, well-dressed man of about his own age but looking younger, and as careless and confident in bearing as he himself was troubled and suspicious.

The man glanced at him sharply as they met, and turned to look after him when he had passed; then followed him for a few hundred yards, saying aloud: "By Jove, I believe there's Charley turned up again!"

Presently he quickened his steps and soon closed with him, laying his hand suddenly on his shoulder, and saying, in a ringing metallic voice; "Charley, my boy, is that you?"

Charles Lanfear gave a little exclamation, and shrank back with a sudden start. He had no need to look into the cruel laughing face above him, with the two sharp rodent-like teeth displayed beneath the thin lips; he knew who it was well enough; but after that first movement he made no further sign. He seemed to accept an unwelcome presence with the patient humbleness of one born into all things cruel and unpleasant, and over whom pain had the bitter rights of use. Besides, was it not the thing that he had been hourly dreading? Had he not known all along that his enemy was behind him, and that sooner or later he would come up with him and stand there face to face, as he stood now?

"Yes, Alick," he said quietly; "you see I have come home again."

"I was looking for you about this time," said Alick, with a boisterous kind of cordiality, as false as it was boisterous. "But why did you not hunt up old friends, hey?" with a sounding laugh. "That was unhandsome of you, Charley!"

"What old friends care to be hunted up by me, Alick?" answered Lanfear.

"Pshaw! we all have to square up our little accounts with society some time or other. You happen to have made a greater hole in your moral capital than some others, and you were found out; but what of that? The more boldly you face those two facts—the hole and the discovery—the sooner you'll get yourself put through. There is no use in running away from one's difficulties, Charley. The only thing to do is to fight them to the end; one gets out of one's misery all the sooner, whether one wins or loses."

"Yes, it is all very well to say 'fight them to the end,'" returned Charles Lanfear peevishly; "but there are some men who cannot fight, and who have nothing for it but to submit to circumstances and wait on chances."

"You were always soft, Charley," sneered Alick; "a good fellow, but decidedly pappy!"

"So you found, and made your account of, Alick," flashed out Charley—the bitterness of the weak man, taunted after he has been used, breaking down his natural timidity for just a moment.

"Well, so I did, I confess; but I paid you, Master Charley; and handsomely too. You must not forget that when you sum up your little bill against me."

"Yes, you paid me handsomely for doing your dirty work," said Charley; "I have never denied that. You paid me handsomely."

"And if the work was dirty, you had time enough to see the dirt," laughed Alick. "And you were paid in proportion," he added.

"Then we have no claim against each other," said Charley quickly; "we are quits, Alick."

"Claim! who talks of claim, my boy? Not I! It would be 'no assets' if I did," answered Alick, still laughing in that hard, ringing way of his, which had neither mirth nor heart in it. "I only want to see you start fair again; and if I could lend you a helping hand I would, that is all."

"Thank you; but I want no helping hand. I can do for myself," said Charles Lanfear. He spoke hastily, and as if instinctively shrank away to the other side of the pavement. He seemed to dread this man's power over him, and to fear the future quite as much as he lamented the past.

"Do for yourself, can you? You are a lucky fellow then, and I congratulate you. It is not everyone who can do for himself without friends to help him; and if *you* can, you have distanced *me*, that is all I can say."

When he said this, squaring his shoulders and thrusting out his chest, while using that tone of affected humility which is used by some prosperous men boasting of their prosperity under the guise of bewailing their lower condition, Charley wondered—as indeed he had often wondered in these later years—how he ever came to love Alick Farmer, false, boastful, cruel, as he had always been from boyhood upward. What had been the spell upon him?—why had he not been always able to read him as he read him now, and in that reading to despise and shun him?

"You are talking nonsense, Alick," he said quite quietly; "and you know it. Yet, for all you are so much above me, I do not want your help."

"You always were a marvel, Charley! Not want my help, after such an upset as you have had? Wonderful! But I remember at school the way you used to fall soft was something unapproachable—what the Yankees would call a caution. And the boy was father to the man, hey? You have still that faculty of landing on your legs?"

"If you call it landing on my legs," said Charley, half sadly, half derisively.

By this time they had reached the door of Charley's lodgings in Hart Street, and involuntarily he stopped; then hurried on again to conceal that he had stopped. His life was full of these odd little bits of patchwork—

these steps backward to recover lost ground, and irresolution and timidity following on incautious self-betrayal. But Alick's eyes were as keen as a hawk's and his senses as acute as a bloodhound's; and he caught both the error and the embarrassment as quickly as the one was committed and the other shown.

"You live here, I see?" he asked, halting.

"Yes," said Charley Lanfear, always "unable to tell a lie at a pinch," as Alick had once said of him in disdain.

"Good night, then; I will not take you further. What is your number? Oh, I see!"—looking at it, then writing it in his pocket-book. "I'll come and look you up one of these days; I'd like to see how you get on. For all that you are so deuced independent of me now, I might be able to bear a hand if you wanted me—who knows? Stranger things have happened! By the bye, I have never asked after the fair Amy yet; is she well? Ah! glad of that," in recognition of Charley's dumb assent. "Remember me to her, will you? and, once more, good night."

Saying which, Alick nodded to his friend with careless disrespect, and, turning back, drove off to his club, laughing to himself; as cruel men do laugh when they have done an act of wanton mischief.

His head depressed and his pale face wan and weary, Charles Lanfear mounted the dingy stairs, and entered

the sitting room where his family lived. Three people were in the room as he entered—his wife Amy, a small, dark, careworn woman, who had once been as beautiful as an olive-coloured Hebe, but whose pinched and painful face had lost all traces now of its former loveliness and was merely intense, drawn and anxious; his daughter Edith, a tall fair girl of nineteen or twenty, but with a subdued manner little in accordance with the bright blue eyes, the rounded dimpled chin, and the rich colouring of cheeks and hair; and Harold, his son, a year younger than Edith, tall like Edith, dark like his mother, but with his father's features and expression. Yet, perhaps because of the freshness of youth, perhaps because of the admixture of the more fibrous nature of his mother, he did not look so weak and irresolute as Charley, though, unhappily for himself, he was as sensitive and loving; and, more unhappily still, imaginative and poetical; which Charley was not.

Amy needed to look only once at her husband to see that something was wrong, perhaps to guess what it might be. She rose from her chair, laying down her work with a certain weariness of manner, as of one hounded out of a pleasant resting place and obliged to take up again a burden laid aside for a moment. She looked neither annoyed nor surprised at what she believed to be the forecasting of a new misfortune—only very weary, but very resolute.

"You are tired, Charley?" she said, laying her hand in his, and speaking with a tenderness of manner scarcely to have been expected from her, judging from her face only. "Or, has anything happened to vex you?" she added.

"Yes," answered Charley in a low voice; "I want to speak to you alone, Amy."

Amy looked behind her sharply to where Edith was sitting, talking to her brother in whispers.

"Leave the room, Edith, and take Harold with you," she said quickly, speaking as if Harold were a child and under the control of his sister.

The two young people rose and left the room without remonstrance or remark; both looking wistfully at their father as they passed, but neither speaking to him though their young faces were full of love and a troubled wish to share the trouble which they saw in him.

"What is it, Charley?" asked Amy, when they were alone.

"I have met Alick Farmer."

The careworn, sharp-featured wife gave no melodramatic scream or start; there was no outward expression of anguish or despair; but her face grew old and hard, her brows contracted, the lines about her mouth deepened, her figure straightened, and her thin throat seemed strung with beating threads of wire,

It was fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus again and fighting to defend not only herself, but him and them.

"Did he speak to you, Charley? did he know you?"

"Yes; he came upon me suddenly, and walked with me."

"Did you let him know where you lived?"

"I could not help it, Amy; indeed I could not! He came with me to the door, and so saw where we lived."

She sighed—a sigh her husband knew too well, eloquent as it was of the hopelessness lying in the ever-recurring attempt to protect one who could not help himself, and who was continually spoiling all her plans by his weakness.

"Does he know your present name?" she continued, after a pause. "Surely you did not tell him that, Charley!"

"No, he did not ask," said Charley simply. "I suppose he thinks it what it was."

"That is good, so far," Amy answered. Then she said suddenly and authoritatively: "We must leave London, and at once—to-morrow; there is no time to be lost."

"You know best, Amy; I will do just what you like," said Charley submissively.

"Just what I like! If only you would have some

opinion of your own, Charley!"—that hopeless sigh again repeated—"if only you would care to plan and arrange for yourself!"

"Why should I, dear, when you do everything so much better than I could? There can be only one head in every family, and I am sure you make a far better head than I should."

He spoke with almost boyish simplicity and with more than boyish humility; and Amy, touched if weary, loving if hopeless, stooped and kissed his forehead as he sat on the low chair beside her, feeling, as she had often felt before, that, heavy as her trouble was, she would bear even more and weightier for love. That was just the barter—sorrow, disgrace and fear, for the sole exchange of Love!

"I must tell Edith," she then said; "she must explain it to Harold."

"Poor Edith!" said Charley, tears filling his soft blue eyes; "poor, poor Edith!"

"Why do you pity her, Charley?" asked the wife, with a jealous accent. "Why should she be pitied? Have I not borne everything that she should be kept from trouble? And what will she know now to distress her? That we leave town suddenly! What is there in that to make her an object of compassion?—and after all that I have suffered!"

Her lips quivered, but her eyes were hard rather than moist.

"Yes; I pity her, and I pity you much more, Amy!" said Charley tenderly.

But Amy was ruffled. She could not share the love for which she had suffered so much even with a daughter, and demanded that her husband should be as entirely absorbed in her as if there were no children to claim part of his affection. He was all in all to her; why should she not be all in all to him? Unlike women in general, she had sunk the mother in the wife and placed the children below the husband; and what she had done for him he too must do for her. Not indeed, that she had seen much of her children until quite of late. They had been sent over to England so soon as they were old enough for school, and were thus in a manner unknown to their parents. Six months' companionship had not bridged over the gap of fifteen years' separation; and Edith and Harold were still little more than strangers to the father and mother who lived their own life in secret and apart, and seemed only anxious to prevent their children from sharing it.

Such at least was the mother's ruling. Charley, left to himself, would have made friends, perhaps confidants, of both son and daughter; but Amy stood between them, and kept him jealously to herself.

It had always been so. No one might attend to Charley, no one might love him, or give him pleasure, or be loved by him, but herself; and, from the earliest

time, the children had been taught to keep away and to themselves, and told that their caresses teased poor papa. Thus the young things had grown up all in all to each other; the elder girl more like a young mother to her sensitive, sickly brother than like a sister playmate of equal age; for Harold was as entirely her care as Charley was Amy's, and as jealous of his love as her mother was of his father's. It was a strange repetition of feeling and circumstance, and in both cases the woman was the stronger.

Her jealous pain had not quite passed away when Mrs. Lanfear opened the door of the sitting room and called Edith, harshly, to come to her at once. The girl ran down hurriedly. The hard accent of her mother's voice startled her, and she too, seemed conscious of a coming trouble. She had learnt of late to feel afraid of something, she did not know what; it was the atmosphere of a secret which she might not know, yet could not ignore, that made her thus anxious and fearful; for the young feel what they can neither formularize nor understand.

"Edith," said her mother abruptly, "you must pack up your things and Harold's to-night. We leave London to-morrow."

"Leave London to-morrow, mamma! Why?" cried Edith.

It was a very natural question—indeed, rather an

exclamation than a question—but it annoyed Amy who dreaded nothing so much as questions, and who had often asked herself what she should do when Edith grew old enough to have perceptions and the right to exercise them.

"It is not your place to ask why," she said sharply. "Your duty is to obey orders, Edith, not dispute them."

"I do not dispute them, dear mamma; I was only surprised—it is so sudden!" said Edith, with a pretty deprecating smile, but sadly too timid for a daughter.

"Tell your brother that we leave London to-morrow," continued Mrs. Lanfear, not suffering herself to be softened by that sweet young face, loving and lovely though it was, but keeping her eyes fixed steadily just above her head. "I am busy, and must attend to my duty."

And her words confessed unconsciously that she did not consider kindly intercourse with her boy, or the association of her children with herself in even the minor things of life, one of the duties which she was bound to perform. Had she spoken for hours, she could have said nothing more expressive.

"Shall I tell him anything else, mamma?" asked Edith; "explain anything to him?"

"Yes; tell him that your father's health is bad—that the work at Chaplin's office is too much for him—

and that we must go out of town at once, and get him into the country, else he will be ill."

Mrs. Lanfear spoke in a hard dry way, as if repeating a lesson learned by heart; looking back at her husband, not her daughter.

"Poor papa!" said Edith lovingly.

Charley Lanfear dropped his eyes.

Amy's brows contracted.

"If you have nothing else to say, you had better go and do your work, Edith," she said coldly. "You have not much time."

"I have only one thing to say," Edith answered; "what am I to do about my pupils? Poor little things! I shall be quite sorry to lose them!" a little sadly. "They were getting on so nicely, and I was so glad to feel that I was earning a little for myself and helping poor papa. How shall I let them know we are going away so suddenly?"

"Write," said her mother laconically.

"But they owe me some money!" said Edith.

And money was by no means a drug in the Lanfear market; least of all to Edith, who had spent in imagination her little earnings twenty different ways already, but always on Harold and papa, and something for mamma too—not quite so beautiful as for Harold and papa—never on anything for herself.

"How much do they owe you?" asked her mother.

"Nearly the quarter—almost five pounds," said Edith. It seemed such a large sum, as she gave it out with a pretty girlish pride in her bread-winning powers!

"It will be useful for our settling in; they can send it by post-office order when we are settled. No," Amy then said, interrupting herself and speaking with a suspicious kind of accent; "you must go for it yourself to-morrow morning, Edith. You must explain your position to them, and they will pay you. They had better not write."

"I should not know where to tell them to write to," said Edith; "I do not know where we are going."

"I will tell you to-morrow," answered her mother. "Papa and I have not quite made up our minds yet, and it will be time enough for you and your brother to know when we are on our journey. So go and do as I have said, Edith. Tell your brother what I have told you, and pack up for him. I cannot tell you any more."

And Edith went back to Harold, who had been waiting for her at the head of the stairs imagining every kind of romance that could possess a young brain, and old him the news—the two wondering greatly at this sudden resolve of mamma's, and speculating wildly as o the cause, and where they were going, and what kind of life they would lead in the country.

"So long as we are together, Edith, it does not make much matter where we are," said Harold, bringing his hands together with a nervous clasp, as he often did when speaking to Edith.

"No, not if poor papa keeps well, and has some work to do."

"If I keep well too, Edith," returned. Harold quickly. "Papa is stronger than I am, and has mamma to look after him; why don't you say if I keep well?"

"And if you keep well, too, dear," she answered, going over to him and kissing his flushed face.

"You must never like anyone as much as you like me Edith!" said Harold quite gravely; "not even papa or mamma—no one?"

"No one," answered Edith; "I never could like anyone as much as you, Harold. We are all we have for each other."

"And quite enough," he said. "So long as we have each other, what more should we want?"

"Nothing," said Edith.

There was no more time now for talk of any kind. The rest of the evening was spent in collecting together and packing the not too numerous possessions of the family; and by noon the following day all outlying business had been gone through, and they were on the Great Western railway steaming rapidly out of town and away from that source and centre of hidden

danger—the man Alick, who had spoken to Charlie Lanfear last night.

"Now I will tell you where we are going, Edith," said Mrs. Lanfear, drawing a deep breath as they passed the last of the new houses bordering the line and dashed out into the free country. "To Alton Roadend."

"And where is Alton Roadend, mamma?" asked the girl, whom the mere name made no wiser. "And why are we going there?" she added.

"Alton Roadend is a little village I used to hear of when a girl," said her mother; "where the air is very soft, and likely to do your father good."

"Poor darling papa, I hope it will!" said Edith tenderly, looking at the weak, handsome face with a compassionate love in her own, and laying her hand in his timidly. He lifted his face to her with a yearning that was as sad as it was strange. It seemed as if those two hearts wanted only leave to understand each other, for the one to find happiness and the other to give joy by love.

"Talk to me, Edith!" said Harold, pulling her dress impatiently.

"Yes, Edith, attend to your brother, and amuse him; I will take care of your papa," said her mother coldly. "Besides, poor papa is tired."

And then the two stole away to the other end of the carriage, and talked in the whispered noiseless way

habitual to them, till the train reached Horsley, the small town which was the metropolis to Alton Roadend —feeding it with news and fashions and the fine arts, in return for the farm produce and the dairy goods which the little village sent in with punctual care on market days.

Alton Roadend was a secluded village about seven miles from Horsley, and a dozen miles from everywhere else. It consisted of the Hall, the Vicarage, the doctor's square white stuccoed house at the north end, and a fancy cottage in the Elizabethan style at the south end of the village, off the main road and down a little lane; of the village inn, the village smithy, and a few dusty little depôts for miscellaneous goods, called drapers' shop or grocers,' indiscriminately; while the rest of the human dwellings were little better than huts and hovels clustered about the old grey church, or scattered on the outskirts of the various farms. The Hall was owned by the Shenstones, the great landed proprietors of the place; the vicar was the Reverend Mitchell Seymour; Mr. James Bent was the doctor; and Rosehill, the fancy cottage in the Elizabethan style standing back from the main road, was at present unoccupied. An old grand-aunt of Amy's used to live there in bygone times; which was how it came about that she knew anything of the place at all; but the old lady had been dead now for many years, and, as her

name had not been Lanfear, there was no danger of any recognition. And very likely the place had passed into other hands, she thought, as she prepared to set out to the village with her husband; leaving the two young people at Horsley in charge of the luggage till their return.

It was that old bygone association with Roadend, as the place was usually called, dropping the Alton for shortness, which had induced her to try their fortune there on their flight from London. And as she was personally unknown, never having visited here before, and as her grand-aunt had been dead so many years now, leaving neither child nor dependent behind her, there was no possible danger in that slender little link with the past. Ah! if they could but find a place where the man Alick and all the miserable train of circumstances associated with him might never find them out!—if they could but escape from the past and from themselves, and flee to a Zoar where the world would never track them! She did not think of the injustice to her children in thus burying them in a remote country place, where the silver of their youth would tarnish and the blossom of their energies droop and decay. She did not care for Harold's checked career, for Edith's broken occupation; her whole care was for her husband—to save him from danger and from sorrow, perhaps from sin. They were martyrs one and

all for him; and she would have given him more than their prosperity—she would have given their very lives—could that have either pleased or profited him. The whole force of a nervously intense nature was concentrated on this one love, which the habit of sacrifice and the consciousness of protection served to increase.

Yes, a remote, secluded little village, such as Alton Roadend used to be in the days when she heard it spoken of, would be the fittest place for them; and if the village had remained what it was, and there was habitation for them at all, they would pitch their tent here at once. And then would they not be safe from the prying eyes of their worst enemy, the man who had brought them such illimitable desolation and sin? So she thought and speculated through the bleak winter's drive, her husband's hand in hers and her eyes fixed with a mournful passion on his face; while he, leaning back in the corner of the fly, went into a tranquil sleep, content to be guided according to her will and glad to be spared both trouble and responsibility.

Their search for a home did not last long. Providentially, Amy thought, Rosehill was still unoccupied, and to be let furnished cheap. It was all very poor and shabby, truly; the carpets were worn, the curtains frayed and faded, the paper hanging in mildewed blisters on the wall; the garden was choked with

weeds and briars, the fences were broken, the gate hung sideways on one rusty hinge; it was as neglected and unprepossessing a place as could well be imagined, for all its pretensions of Elizabethan architecture and fancy decorations; but Amy Lanfear said: "We will take it, Charley," in a tone of relief and rejoicing, and Charley signed the paper with obedient patience which gave him the occupancy for a year of Rosehill Cottage, Alton Roadend. By nightfall they had settled in, and their life of seclusion and social interment had begun. And by nightfall the Shenstones at the Hall, and the Seymours at the vicarage, and Mr. James Bent, of the square white stuccoed house, had all heard that Rosehill was taken, and that the new comers could not be worth much so far as money or niceness of habits went, as they had made no stipulation for repairs, but had taken the old rats' castle as it stood, and had actually come in this very night.

CHAPTER II.

MUSCLE AND MIND.

"WHAT are we to do about these new people at Rosehill, papa?" asked Mrs. Shenstone of her husband, as they all sat together at luncheon.

The Lanfears had been at the cottage for about a fortnight now, and had been met on the roads often enough to make it awkward, as the phrase goes, if the barricade of mutual ignorance had to be kept up.

"Oh, let us go and call on them! let us know them!" shouted half a dozen young voices, speaking at once.

"It will be awfully jolly to have some new people at the old place," said Rupert, the second boy, entered last term at Cambridge, and, in consequence of his Freshman's dignity, confident about all things in heaven and earth.

"And the girl is awfully handsome!" chimed in Fred, the eldest, in his last year, and just beginning to be afraid of that coming rasper of his, and speculating as to whether he should land among the first twenty of the Poll, or be the Wooden Spoon, as a distinction; Wranglers and Ops, senior or junior, were as

unattainable to him as stars and garters at court, he thought—not without reason. It was the Christmas vacation at the present time, and both were home "for the holidays;" Alton Hall being one of those homes which are life-long holidays to a family.

"Yes, mamma, do let us know them, they look so nice!" added Mabel, the eldest girl, a year below Fred in age, and half a dozen years above every one else in wisdom.

"I will do as papa likes," returned pretty Mrs. Shenstone, smiling.

"As you like yourself, Mar," answered her florid, curly-polled, fox-hunting husband. It was his usual answer on home subjects. Positive enough out of doors, within the four walls he liked his wife to reign.

"Oh, then, mamma, you will do as *we* like!" said Mabel, with the tranquil air of one with whom a question is settled past dispute.

"Blessed old mater, of course she will!" said Fred, kissing her.

"Get away, you rude boy, you spoil my cap!" cried his mother, laughing, as she settled the daintiest little trifle of lace and ribbon that ever milliner considered a decent covering for the human head.

But it was quite understood now that she would do as her children wished, and that the new people would be gauged, and the measure of their capacity taken, before the week was out.

The Shenstones of Alton Hall were a family which, people said, "it did them good to see." A family of twelve, ranging from Fred, the eldest, and quite a responsible man in the ripeness of his twenty-two years, to the little baby in the cradle, born last year with the roses and the honeysuckles; a breezy, bright, happy, open-air family, always in the open air, hunting, fishing, shooting, riding, or walking; a family that kept all the doors and windows wide open even in mid-winter, and who scorned all mention of colds and coughs as they would have scorned the suspicion of cowardice; a family whose fresh complexions and heroic encounters of ice and snow—as if a temperature below freezing point were "summer heat" just a degree modified—were suggestive of innumerable tubbings and towellings; a noisy, laughing, good-humoured, healthy, affluent family, by no means ignorant, but by no means hysterical with over-wrought thought, or likely to get headaches by hard reading; a family that gave soup and flannel and screws of tobacco and pounds of tea among the poor liberally, and to whom the beasts and birds and all starving things whatever came to be fed—but to whom no one in moral doubt, in religious difficulty, or in the spiritual agony of sin repented of, would have gone for help or guidance. Physical want they could understand; social sorrow and domestic bereavements they could also understand; but the sickness of the soul was

a thing unknown to them—as much unknown as falsehood, weakness or ill-humour. Their whole character and aspect was one of untainted vigour and purity, of healthy bodies and tranquil minds; and people somehow were ashamed to seem unhappy or to be fretful or discontented when the Shenstones of Alton Hall burst on them like the incarnation of all the healing powers of nature and the happiness of life combined.

Even the Lanfears, wrapped up in themselves and their fears as they were, felt that they must expand with at least an appearance of serenity when the noisy cavalcade of four came riding up to Roschill, entering that squalid, melancholy cottage of theirs, with its grim Secret haunting every chamber, like light suddenly flowing into darkness—fresh air and sweet wood-scents streaming through the closeness of a dungeon.

Nothing could be a greater contrast than that which they all made as they sat together. Mrs. Shenstone, fair-haired and blue-eyed, with her fresh skin and bright smile—like a great girl yet for innocence and simplicity—the pure and easy flow of her life having brought her no deep experience, and left on her no trace of trouble; and Mrs. Lanfear, small, dark, deeply lined, intense, to whom every year of life had been like two for wear and tear of mind and body. Mr. Shenstone, not unlike the typical John Bull of *Punch*, large

and solid, good-tempered, hearty, rubicund and positive; and poor weak Charley, with his handsome face and thin, fair, uncurled hair, not strong enough to be actively bad, and yet not strong enough to be persistently good. Fred, a broad-shouldered, stalwart, young, muscular Christian, with clear perceptions and good abilities, but with no imagination, and with about as much poetry in him as there is in a young Newfoundland dog, fond of animals, up in all sports, and with a thorough contempt for all mankind not gentlemen of the Anglo-Saxon type, nor orthodox and loyal; and Harold, slender, poetic, feverish, spending his days in dreams, and already waking to the consciousness that society wants something more for its salvation than Church and State and the correct way of eating peas. Even Mabel and Edith contrasted as strongly as the rest; though the lines of unlikeness were not so broad, in the light and happy nature of the one and the graver tenderness of the other. The one was a child of woman's age and stature; the other was a woman who had never been a child.

But they all fraternized very well together, differences notwithstanding; and the dictum of Fred and Mabel respectively, as they rode away, was that Edith was "stunning" and a "darling," and that they were "awfully nice people on the whole." Not that the Shenstones knew so little of the world as to think

all things necessarily charming, but they were so genial and good-natured, they always found something to admire wherever they went:—which came to the same thing in the end.

After the Shenstones had been, the Seymours called on the Lanfears. But they did not count for so much in the social summing up; for the two elders were just quiet orderly folks, as befitted, and their only son, young Craven, had but few thoughts beyond his briefs, and his chances at the bar, his love for Mabel Shenstone, and when would the Fates be generous and let the long term of trial come to an end? Such a long term of trial as it seemed to be to the impatience of youth!—six months engaged and a whole lifetime in love, and no chance of marrying yet visible on the horizon. Still, the Seymours were kindly and sociable, and seemed to like what they saw of both Harold and Edith. At all events, they asked them to the Vicarage the next day, "to meet the Shenstone boys and girls," and expressed their pleasure at the addition to their small circle which the new occupants of Rosehill would make, which was as much as could be expected at first starting. Mr. James Bent, the doctor, did not call with the rest; but, as he was unmarried, it did not so much signify, and no one missed him.

So now the young Lanfears were launched into society in real earnest, and Amy and Charley stood by,

half in fear, wondering where it would all lead, and how the launching would answer. For themselves, they kept as much secluded as if neither Hall nor Vicarage had opened its house door and offered them free ingress. They knew that their children could say nothing very explanatory of their previous condition, and that the Secret, which had burnt all the joy out of Amy and all the manliness out of Charley, was safe in their ignorance if it would not have been in their knowledge.

That there was a secret was evident to all—a secret shown by the very scantiness and blankness of detail. Harold told more than Edith, as was perhaps natural; and from him the Shenstones learnt that papa and mamma had lived in Australia, where he and Edith were born; that then they had been sent over to school in England—but not to school exactly, to a lady whom mamma knew when she was a girl, and who brought them up, but where no other pupils were taken; that papa and mamma had come home for good now, and they were all going to live together ever after. But papa and mamma were not very well, and they were always tired, said Harold, and he and Edith were left entirely to themselves.

He liked that, he answered quickly, when Rupert asked him if it was not rather slow work being shut up always with a girl, and having no brothers to go

about with? Slow?—no; he liked being with Edith better than with any one else; she knew what he meant, and she liked his stories and his verses better than any one else did, and she was kinder and nicer to him altogether. He felt lost without Edith, and cared more for her than for all the world beside; and she cared more for him—with a wistful glance backward to where she was sitting, talking to Fred Shenstone and laughing as she did not often laugh at home.

The Shenstones felt there was a mystery in all this, sure enough; but they were people who did not care much for mysteries or their solution, and for the most part accepted things and men as they seemed to wish to be accepted. If there were a secret to be guarded, let it be guarded! It was not for them to ferret out what was designedly hidden. So long as things were not proved to be wrong they were right, was the Shenstone creed, as it is with most people who are healthy and not dramatic.

"Tell me about your life in Australia, Miss Lanfear," Mr. Shenstone had said once.

To which Edith had answered, "I have nothing to tell you, Mr. Shenstone. We lived far away from every one—quite in the bush. I do not remember anything so plainly as two bower birds that built their run near our house; and once we saw a kangaroo hunt; and once we went a long way off and saw the stock-

driving at a farm mamma had something to do with. But that is all."

And that was all. The girl had literally nothing more to tell, and so far the danger of unconscious betrayal was avoided. For what else had the mother stood so vigilantly between her husband and her children?—for what else had she schemed and toiled and suffered, but to put it out of their power to disclose what it had cost her everything to conceal?

Never had the young Lanfears known such a happy life as now. It was an initiation into a new existence, and for the first time they felt like to, and at one with, their fellow-creatures. With the two girls a special friendship sprang up, shared indeed in pleasantness by the younger ones; but, as they were all so much younger, they were adjuncts rather than anything else. They thought Edith a queen, more or less royal according to their degress of remove; but she was only a queen to them while she was Mabel's friend. Indeed, Edith and Harold and Mabel grew to be a standing triad with whose ways and works no one interfered—not even Rosa, nearly seventeen, and "a woman in her own right," as she used to say with a toss of her fair frizzly head, quite unanswerable in its way.

And yet that friendship had its dangers, at least for one of them; and all the greater in that Mabel saw nothing, and so did her mischief in ignorance. For

what was Harold to her but just a pleasant, tender-hearted boy, not unlike a brother, save that he was weaker and "more muffish," she often said, than any brother of *hers* could possibly have been; while to him she was simply the queen of his romance, the idol of his dreams, the worshipped and beloved, as even Edith had never been worshipped, and as none but Edith had ever been beloved! Mabel saw nothing of all this, and would not have understood it had she seen it; as love of a sickly boy of eighteen for a healthy girl two years his senior is a thing never taken into serious account by the young. That Harold's nature was being influenced for good or evil, for joy or sorrow, by her, would have seemed to Mabel just as preposterous as that her favourite horse or pet canary should suffer or be glad because of her love. Yes; Harold Lanfear was just a human version of the favourite horse or pet canary, and she liked him about as much, and regarded him no more. But she was Love and Life to him; and day by day he went deeper into the waters which drown young souls for ever, if they do not carry them by pleasant currents to the only sure harbourage to be gained by man.

So the winter melted into the spring, the spring ripened into the summer, and then Fred and Rupert came back from Cambridge; Craven Seymour came down from London; the governess went off for her

holidays; all the boys swarmed home from their various schools and collegiate establishments; the colts were taken up from grass; the baby began to walk alone and to make herself intelligible in her more imperious wants, and the full fresh life of the summer set fairly in.

"It was very jolly to be all together again," said the Shenstone boys twenty times a day, as they spread themselves over the country like a tribe of curly-headed Bedouins, sometimes dragging their mother and sisters and the young Lanfears with them, no matter what the thorns to be scrambled through, the bogs to be crossed, the fences to be clambered over, the rough places in pathless woods to be broken through. This free, strong, masculine life was the only life they knew of or could imagine, and they went into it with a zeal worthy of a religious exercise. To Edith it was a new reading of humanity altogether. Accustomed to the feverish power of her mother in contrast with the plaintive sweetness of her father, and accustomed to be herself rather the guardian than the companion of her brother, and to make allowances for his physical weakness instead of falling below his measure of strength as would have been natural, it was intensely delightful to her to see the Shenstone boys take the lead in all things, while the girls, and even the pretty girl-like mother, just followed as they were led. It

was a rest to her such as only those who have been long thrust to the front and over-weighted with responsibilities can understand; and it raised her spirits and lightened her heart till she seemed to grow younger and more childlike each day. She and Fred were great friends this summer. He took it on himself to teach her all she ought to know to make her perfect according to his formula of perfection; his various educational courses comprising riding, fishing, and shooting at a mark with the prettiest little pistol in the world, bought on purpose—just to accustom her to firearms, and not to let her scream and be afraid of an unloaded gun if it was brought into the room, like silly girls who think things can go off of themselves, and that unloaded guns will fire straight if they are only looked at. Edith learnt these gifts and graces of the young heir of the Hall, and did not think her time ill employed.

But Harold could be taught nothing of all this. He was nervous by temperament, and awkward forbye, as lanky, short-sighted boys who have never been to school, often are; and, though he could make up stories for the little ones, and write long poems to Mabel, and weave dreams and imaginings which made the young Shenstones stare, because they were like things they read and they could not understand how things they read could be spoken *vivâ voce* by a companion of their

own, yet he failed miserably in the muscularity which was the order of the day at the Hall, and got laughed at and chaffed without stint or mercy in consequence. Only Edith did not laugh at him; but even Edith regretted his want of manliness, and went ahead of him when he thought she should have dutifully kept behind, so as not to have shamed him by her superiority. Besides she was always with Fred now; which, however, hurt him less, inasmuch as he himself was always with Mabel.

It was a beautiful summer's day, and the whole family was out and about the grounds, some here, some there, all united yet all independent. Harold was trying to interest Mabel in a poem which he had finished yesterday, about illimitable sorrow and the sanctification resulting; and Mabel, because she was kind-hearted, had been doing her best not to yawn; but every now and then she had turned wistfully to the terrace walk under the old limes which made the range of the shooting gallery,—Fred and Edith were standing there now, firing at a mark,—and every now and then she had turned more wistfully still to the great gates, through which she expected to see Craven Seymour ride. Presently he came, and with him the end of Mabel's mild purgatory and of Harold's shadowy heaven.

It was natural perhaps, that Craven should be a

little impatient of Harold's boyish devotion. They were all young together, and young people are never tolerant and seldom generous. So Craven, though a good fellow, liked to put down Harold with a high hand, as a slight revenge for his excessive admiration of Mabel—*his* Mabel, whom no one but himself had the right to admire; and he put him down to-day with even a higher hand than usual.

"There, Lanfear, that will do," he said when Harold had tried his strength with the rest, to show off before Mabel, and had failed in everything undertaken. Georgie distanced him in running; Evan knocked him to pieces in croquet; Rupert was before him in archery; Franky jumped higher and longer and better; he was overcome in everything, and the more he tried to do well, the more his feverish impatience destroyed his power.

"You are not quite up to the Hall mark, Lanfear, so you need not try," laughed Craven a little maliciously. "Is he, Mabel?"

"Not quite," said Mabel unconcernedly. "We must teach you, Harold, now that the boys are at home. You are so impatient, though, you will not try to learn, but want to do everything at once. That is never the way to get on."

"I don't like to fail," said Harold nervously.

"But you must learn before you can succeed in

anything," urged Mabel. "It is childish to be so much ashamed of not knowing a thing that you will not let yourself be taught."

"Yes, Lanfear, that is your weak point," said Craven loftily. "You are so absurdly proud and sensitive! you will never get on if you go about the world all bristles and needles."

"Go and swing the little ones, Har," said Mabel, who wanted to get rid of him.

"I will go and wrestle with Georgie," answered Harold rather grandly.

"With Georgie! Georgie will throw you before you know where you are," said Craven.

Georgie was twelve last birthday.

"No! go help the little ones," repeated Mabel, as she put her hand in Craven's, and the two wandered off together, bodily to the shrubbery, spiritually to Elysium, leaving the boy standing on the upper terrace looking down on the happy groups scattered about the garden, and feeling humiliated and disregarded.

Where was Edith? Sensitive as he was, his momentary isolation seemed like the neglect of hours. "Why did not Edith see that he was alone and come to him?" he thought, watching her as she stood in the "shooting gallery," listening smilingly to Fred's instructions. "She cared nothing for him now," he said, half aloud; "she cared only for Fred Shenstone, not for him, as she

used! And no wonder! See what a manly fellow Fred was, able to do everything he chose to do; and what a poor, weak creature he was! How could any girl, sister or not, like him the best? It was impossible! Below the very children in the virtue of force—not up to the Hall mark, anyhow, as Craven Seymour had just said—how could Edith like him, or feel proud of him! And yet, had he not powers which they had not?—powers of a higher order than the mere ability to pitch a quoit or to leap a five-barred gate?" Harold was far from being vain or even self-satisfied; but there was a transient reaction of pride as he thought how dull of fancy and imagination were all these young sons of Anak as compared with himself, and how clear were things to him which to them were hidden and obscure. But this lasted only a moment, youth not giving reverence, naturally, to mind as against muscle; and then came back the tide of despair and the self-depreciation accompanying, and the longing to get away from all this vigorous young life which shamed his own so deeply, and to go back to the old quiet days with Edith as his sole companion, his sole friend. He had no friends here—not one! not even Mabel, now that Craven had come down. He stood quite alone among them all, and they all despised him—perhaps by this time Edith as well as the rest.

Suddenly he came up to Edith and Fred, his face very pale and his poor weak lips trembling.

"Edith, I want to go home!" he said.

"Nonsense, Harold! you must stay and see the colt caught. Besides, the mother expects you to stop to dinner," said Fred in his off-hand way.

"I want to go home, Edith," repeated Harold.

"I promised Mrs. Shenstone that we would stay, and mamma will have no dinner for us," said Edith, with a gentle kind of remonstrance. She was very fond of Harold—no sister fonder; but she did not want to go home yet.

"I don't care," was his polite answer, as he turned away. He was but a spoilt boy, remember; and it was she who had mainly helped to spoil him.

"What is the matter, dear Har?" she asked affectionately.

His eyes were full of tears, but he was still petulant.

"You ought to come home with me when I wish it," he answered.

"Bosh! I cannot spare your sister yet; she has to hit the bull's eye before she leaves off. And I know that my mother will not like it if you first accept the invitation and then go away," said Fred—this last a little seriously.

Edith looked from each to each. She would have given up her own pleasures willingly enough for Harold—but then Fred had to be considered; and Mabel, who wanted her to try a duet with her after

dinner; and the sweet mother who had been so kind; and with all these opposing influences at work she hesitated, wishing that her young brother would give up his fancy.

"I will go by myself! You need not come with me. No one need come!" cried Harold suddenly; and rushed away, sobbing.

"I will bring him back, Miss Lanfear. Do you stay where you are," said Fred, keeping Edith back as she was preparing to run after him. "It is too hot for you to run. I will go."

And away he strode, wondering how it came about that Edith's brother was such a muff, and what on earth was wrong? "What on earth, indeed!" he said to himself when he came up with Harold, sitting on the Crossings Bridge, sobbing as if his heart would break.

"Why, Harold, what in heaven's name is the meaning of this?" he said, with a good-humoured contempt that jarred on Harold harshly enough.

But Fred Shenstone was not of the kind to show much mercy to a youth of eighteen sitting on a bridge and crying for nothing. He would have thought him a milksop if he had cried because he was hurt; but for nothing at all—no! he could not pity that!

"Come, rouse up!" he said, shaking his shoulder not unkindly. "You will never be a man, Harold, if you

let yourself cry like a girl! Why, little Evan is too plucky for that! You don't know how odd it seems to me to see you like this; and when I think too, that you and Rupert are both the same age. Come, cheer up, man, and tell me what has vexed you!"

"I want Edith," said Harold, shrinking away.

"Well, here is Edith," said Fred, as the girl came running through the gates; "so now I hope you will be satisfied."

With which he stalked away, in his turn a shade more jealous than he would have cared to confess.

Edith knew how to soothe her brother when these fits of morbid feeling were on him; and after a little time of love and coaxing, pleasant phrases and flattery that did not mean to be flattering but only to be loving, she got him out of this Slough of Despond into which he had fallen, and set him on firm ground again. But poor Harold's character was lost for ever at the Hall now, and they all called him "Cry-baby" among themselves, and considered him a muff past praying for. It was the first hitch in the smooth running of the silken cord, and it was just the hitch that might have been expected.

When Mr. Shenstone heard of the scene, for nothing was ever kept secret at Alton Hall, his first impulse was to go to Rosehill and speak to the Lanfears about Harold, and the necessity of sending him to some

school or establishment where he might learn to be a man.

"It is a thousand pities to see him coddled and messed about as he is," said the hearty fox-hunter; "the lad would be a fine lad enough if he had fair play, but he's messed and moped to death among them all! I think, if I put it fairly to Mr. Lanfear, he will see the reason of my remarks, hey? don't you think so, Mar?" To his wife.

"Surely yes!" said Mar. She always agreed with her handsome husband. "And, indeed, the boy is a little spoiled, though a nice, dear, quiet fellow too, and so clever! but he wants manliness, as you say, papa."

"Well, then, let us go there," said Mr. Shenstone.

And the two rode off together; fuller of zeal than of knowledge. It was a delicate subject to touch, and it might be feared that Mr. Shenstone, being of the bovine type, would handle it more heavily than discreetly. But, just as large men sometimes dance as lightly as women, so do very honest and straightforward ones sometimes show a quite feminine tact and delicacy; as now, when Mr. Shenstone spoke of Harold's want of masculine fibre, and the good it would do him to be at school, or among youths of his own age, anywhere, "to be hardened a bit, and made fitter for the rough-and-tumble fight of life."

"Yes," chimed in Mrs. Shenstone, speaking to Mrs.

Lanfear; "there is nothing like school for boys. I remember a young cousin of mine, Laura Mason's boy——"

"Laura Mason's boy?" exclaimed Charley. His voice had the ring of terror in it, and his face looked wild and strained. Amy turned quite white, but her countenance remained as impassive, as masked as before.

"Do you know Laura?" asked Mrs. Shenstone, smiling. She saw nothing. "She was such a pretty girl when she was Laura Farmer. Did you know her then?—the Farmers of Southall? I used to stay there a good deal in olden times. We were cousins: I was a Farmer once," smiling again.

"I do not know her; it was only the name that struck me; but I do not know her," said Charley, looking on the ground.

"Well; so I was saying, Laura had a boy something like dear Harold, very delicate, and more like a girl than a boy; but they sent him to this school my husband wants you to try, and now he is brave and strong as any of them! Shall we send you the prospectus?"

"Thank you," said Amy coldly. Charley did not speak, and the conversation dropped quite suddenly; and soon after the Shenstones went away, thinking that they had done a good work, and that most probably the Lanfears would send their boy to the school where Laura Mason's boy had gone, which would be

the saving of him—the saving and the making too!" they said to each other triumphantly.

"It is of no use, Amy," groaned Charley when they were alone; "go where we will, we shall be found out! It will follow us to the end of the world!"

"But it may not be the same, dear; Mason is not an uncommon name."

"No; but Mason and Farmer together—it cannot be a coincidence!" interrupted Charley despairingly. "And if Alick comes! if he meets us here!"

"He must not meet us," said Amy firmly; "we cannot leave, because we have no money to leave with, but we must keep to ourselves and not be seen. The children can tell nothing."

"I trust all to you, Amy," was the weary response. "If it were not for you, I would give up the fight at once, and lie down and die."

"Yes, Charley, I know you would," said Amy; "I know that I am the only thing between you and destruction. But while I live you are safe, my dear—if I have to die to keep you so!" she added, pressing his hand between her own, but sighing as she spoke;—for indeed the fight was hard and heavy and her loneliness might well appall her!

CHAPTER III.

HAROLD AS HERO.

The Shenstones were very fond of making merry by picnics, those most enjoyable of all social gatherings; and their favourite camping-ground was a certain little grassy clearing in Brundum Woods, by the side of the Torver, which was the river of Alton Roadend. Rarely did a week pass without one of these pleasant outings which were scarcely picnics in the usual sense—being confined to the one family only—but rather cold luncheons eaten on the grass, instead of hot dinners served in the dining-room. And when one is young, sitting on dwarf thistles and prickly whin, with "harvestmen" and earwigs rambling over one's plate and creeping up undefended places, is so much nicer than the formal chairs and tables of the dining-room!—and smashed veal pies, the salt in a screw of paper, the lamb among the jelly and the blanc-mange in a conglomerate with the salad, are so infinitely more appetizing than when served, up smoking and separately, according to the art and mystery of the pantry!

The Shenstone boys and girls thought so; probably

all boys and girls think so too; and, as they had now a reinforcement in Harold and Edith, who gave just that slight flavour of foreign addition which lifts a family party out of sameness yet does not hoist it into formality, the gipsy gatherings were in fuller force than ever; to the high glee of all concerned, and the manifest relaxation of even the microscopic amount of discipline kept up at Alton Hall. But, as neither father nor mother believed that discipline made such a good schoolmaster for youth as happiness and freedom, the racket and tumult and loose-lying ends of the Hall seldom received a check and never excited a murmur. Indeed, father and mother joined in the hubbub themselves; and, if they did not add to it, they certainly did but little to moderate it.

It was a specially enjoyable day, and they were all in high spirits—higher even than usual; which was saying much as to the extent to which human joyousness could be carried. There they all were —excepting Mr. Shenstone who had gone over to Horsley on magisterial business; running, leaping, wrestling, singing, doing all that the Shenstones were wont to do and with the Shenstone vociferous demonstration of physical energy and youthful enjoyment. Some climbed up the trees and pelted the rest below with leaves and little twigs; some, mostly the three girls of what they used to call the "middle team," not

carrying their tomboy selves quite to the summit, contented themselves with the lower branches, where they sat and swung like pretty monkeys in crumpled cotton dresses; the little ones, not yet come to the years of modesty, pulled off their shoes and stockings and dabbled among the pebbles close in shore; Mrs. Shenstone sat in the shade, as a kind of court of ultimate appeal respecting distances jumped, the exact number of ducks and drakes made across the river, whose stone threw farthest, and other like knotty points of discussion; and then, sifting by degrees, Mabel and Craven wandered away together, and Edith and Fred Shenstone got so deeply entangled in the intricacies of the wood, they were obliged to sit down on an old mossy tree-stump, or rather on some tree-roots, and talk.

What did they talk of? Poetry? music? what? It is doubtful what manner of conversation it would have seemed to others, but to the two interested it was more like the voice of an angel than, to the one, the questions of an ordinary young man in a tweed shooting jacket—to the other, the answers of a pretty English girl with brown hair and dark blue eyes, crumpling up the folds of her pink muslin dress because she had nothing else to do with her hands. It was just the moment to make one of those indelible impressions on youth which are remembered all through the after-life, and which form a kind of waking-time for the soul. The warm

bright summer day, with the sunlight glinting through the crossing boughs and matted leaves; the fragrance of the flower-full wood; the hum of the wandering insects, and every now and then the sharper cry of some shy creature pattering unseen among the moss and frightened from its silence or calling to its mate; the twittering of the small birds in the trees—the sudden plunge of one larger and stronger as it stirred the leaves in its heavy flight; the distant voices of the children coming in surging gusts of greater or less distinctness, as the shrill laugh rose higher than the merry word; the old mossy roots whereon they sat, starting out like green veins on the earth, plumed by ferns, wood-sorrel and golden moss, and all the other dear woodland flowers which make the sweetest carpet for young lovers' happy feet; the feeling of absolute peace throughout all nature, and that first half-unconscious stirring of the virgin soul which comes before fuller awaking—that delicious sentiment of love still undeveloped and unconfessed, while as yet only a sentiment and before it has become a knowledge—who that has known such a moment, lived through such a scene, can ever forget it?

To the last day of their lives Edith and young Fred would remember that short hour of vague delight in Brundum Woods, when they sat together on the old tree-roots and talked at intervals, they never could

remember of what—she with her soft eyes for the most part cast slightly down, her bright brown hair falling about her neck, her cheeks a little more flushed than usual because of the fuller beating of her heart; and he with all a youth's bright joy and glorious strength in his face and attitude, and yet with a certain not unmanly timidity too, which best expressed the doubt, the modest fear, of young unassured love.

Farther to the side, and quite out of sight and hearing, sat Craven and Mabel, like brother and sister hand in hand without fear or shame. They had passed through their term of delicious ignorance and had come out into that of good fraternal innocent confidence, where was much love but no doubt—much hope but no repining. Theirs was the dawn just brightened into the fresh young morning, with the mist still on the hills and the dewdrops on the grass—the fresh young morning before the stronger life of the day has come; in its way as purely a boy and girl affection as was Edith's and Fred's, and yet with that element of security, the absence of which made the special charm of the younger pair. It was a delicious idyll in both its parts; one could hardly say which was the more beautiful of the two.

Poor Harold was left out of these pleasant couplets. He had been sitting by Mabel when Edith and Fred went away into the leafy wood; and when Mabel and

Craven wandered off to their special nook of paradise, he had been told "to stay with Mrs. Shenstone, and not bother."

Craven said this to him impatiently enough, his impatience becoming more unrestrained as the boy's presence became more obtrusive between him and Mabel.

But, as Edith had left him happy and companioned, she did not think much more about him; though every now and then anxious little fears came across her heart in spite of the richness of her own content; and she felt like a deserter when they did come. The friendship between her and her brother had been of such a deep and special kind, it could not be uprooted even by a first love, though that first love might weaken the force of its expression: still, there it was all the same, though Harold held her to be entirely changed and chilled—to a nature like his the wholeness of devotion and the frequency of expression being the only satisfactory tests of love.

And yet was he not himself also a little changed to Edith? had not his love for Mabel come between them quite as much as hers for Fred, and not so happily? For the poor boy was miserably unhappy, and growing more unhappy as time went on. He knew his own shortcomings clearly enough, and fretted all the more because he knew them so clearly; and yet he did nothing

to overcome them. His whole life was a dream and a regret. Instead of trying to do something that would fit him to be a man when the time came, he spent hours in vague visions of impossible feats, his heroism always taking the form of rescuing Mabel from some danger, with Craven looking on, unable to assist. He wished that the Hall might be on fire, and that he might save her from the flames, carrying her fainting in his arms, like a picture that he had once seen. It did not matter that Mabel was not at all likely to faint in any circumstances whatever, and that it was much more probable that she would rescue him from danger than that he would save her. Possibilities go for little in youthful dreams; and Harold thought out his scenes none the less picturesquely because neither canvas nor colour was attainable. He wanted to do something which should earn her gratitude; or if not her gratitude, then at least her compassion. He would like to be shipwrecked with her, when he would give up his place in the boat for her—the last boat and the last place—and she would see him go down with the sinking ship while she sailed away in the safety which he had bought with his life. Failing such extreme measures, he would be glad to break a limb in her service; in getting her safe over a dangerous place; stopping a runaway horse; defending her from a burglarious ruffian with a bludgeon. Then she would come and sit by him while he lay on the couch, and

bring him flowers, and he would read her his poems, or teach her his favourite passages in Tennyson and Longfellow; and she would pity him for his sufferings and love him for his poems.

But the flesh was weak though the soul was so strong; and Harold was still only an awkward nervous boy to the Shenstones, with what potentiality of heroism he might have as yet wholly undeveloped—and still only "Cry-baby" among the younger ones, with very little chance seemingly of ever being anything else. And had he said all that was in his heart to round, fair, rosy Mabel, with her saucy dimples and her saucier smiles, she would have opened her candid eyes in amazement, and would have understood his heroics no better than she understood brother Fred's algebraic quantities. She was a true Shenstone; and the Shenstones valued muscles, morals and the perceptive faculties; but the whole world of imagination was caviare to them, and likely to remain so.

Harold was sitting now by Mrs. Shenstone, talking, as she afterwards said, "like a book, dear fellow!" while she made grotesque sketches of the little ones, who, with knickerbockers tucked up and petticoats pinned shorter, were dabbling with long naked legs, like featherless cranes, among the water-plants. Mrs. Shenstone was always kind to him, being not so intolerant of failure as her children and old enough to

be both maternal and pitiful. In his heart he often wished she would not be quite so pitiful, and would treat him as cheerily as she treated the others. If she had, he would have wished that she had distinguished him by a special manner given only to him. However, he was tolerably content at this moment, because he was talking like a book; but in a short time little Franky, tired of dabbling, came scampering out of the water to ask Harold to go with him to some private treasures of his own :—"things which neither Fred nor Evan had found, though they had been past the place twenty times and more!" said Franky, tossing his little head with a fine disdain for the obtuser wits of his elder-brothers.

He was a mop-headed little rascal of seven or so, and he thought it fine fun to patronize a grave man, as Harold was by age to him, and to teach him things into the knowledge of which he himself seemed to have been born. Like his brothers, he never remembered the time when he had learned certain facts in natural history; and when he heard Harold Lanfear say that he did not know a grey linnet's song, that he had never found a tomtit's nest, and had not an idea what moths came out of what caterpillars, it was as if he had got hold of some one to whom he was appointed schoolmaster—to his own intense self-glorification; as was natural.

His special point of pride to-day was a waterhen's nest among the flags and bulrushes at White Reach; and at this moment this waterhen's nest seemed to Franky the most precious thing in heaven or earth. Harold was to come with him and see it, under strict promise not to tell where it was to Fred or Rupert or Georgie or Evan or that big Craven Seymour, of whom Franky was slightly in awe, as being a shade less rollicking than the Shenstones proper, with a stricter sense of discipline and by no means so smooth a temper. He might tell Edith, whom Franky adored as a kind of glorified being like the angels of whom he dreamt at night after a more than usually severe course of cherries or hardbake; but only Edith; not even Mabel; and by no means Rose or the younger ones.

"Very well, Franky, I will go with you; and I will not tell," said Harold with reluctance, though good-humouredly, as he scrambled up from his seat on the river-shore pebbles by Mrs. Shenstone's feet.

"Take care of him, Franky," said the pretty mother, as they went away together.

She meant it only in kindly jest, but the words stung the poor boy.

"Even a little fellow like Franky put before him, and told to take care of him!" he thought with a curious mingling of indignation and self-abasement. "He was below a mere baby in their eyes!"

Fretting inwardly, as was his wont, Harold followed the little fellow along the river-side, duly initiated by the way into the habitat of a root of toothwort growing under a stone on a tree-stump—into the exact spot where a crested wren had built her nest last year —into the hole of a big water rat, "as big as a puppy," according to Franky's version—into various snakes' holes and caddisworm shells, empty chrysalis cases, wasps' nests and the like—until they came to the place where the waterhen's nest was to be seen; Franky's crowning triumph in the way of discovery. He was the naturalist of the family *par excellence*, and was always turning up something curious; but a waterhen's nest is not an every-day find; and the triumph was proportionate. Wilful, like all seven-year-old, mop-headed little rascals of good health and hardy education—in his degree as positive as Rupert of all things within his horizon—Franky was perfectly sure as to his powers, and knew exactly how much he could do, if not quite how much he could not do—setting but few things beyond his grasp. And when he essayed dangerous leaps and perilous scrambles, which made Harold's very heart turn sick, he minded no more for his companion's remonstrances than he did for the voice of the stonechat yonder perched on a shore-side cobble and discoursing learnedly. Bruises and cuts and scratches came as naturally to the Shen-

stones as cups of tea to ordinary ladies or cigars to the average man. And if Franky did tumble head foremost here, or feet uppermost there, he only picked himself up again and laughed, rubbing the offended part with his grimy, chubby hand more comically than ruefully. So that when he tucked up his trousers again, and prepared to wade through the muddy shallows among the reeds and rushes to hunt for more treasures, he was heroically blind to any possible danger resulting; and when Harold begged him to come back again —the river was so deep here and the current so strong —he only laughed the more audaciously, and splashed up the water with greater glee.

Suddenly an end came to this childish fun. Either the little fellow stepped on a stone, or he slipped into a hole, or else the ground suddenly shelved—by some means, he could not explain how, he lost his footing and fell face downward in the water; and, before Harold well knew what was amiss, was out of his depth and battling vainly against the current sweeping round the rocks of White Reach.

It was really fine to see how the boy held on. He did not cry out, and he was only just a little frightened; but, frightened or not, he held his own as bravely as if he had been a full-grown man, and only when he became exhausted did his courage give way. But, such a little fellow as he was, he was like a mere

cork or piece of driftweed in the water, unable to make head against the stream, while his struggles only wearied him without helping him out of his danger.

"Harold!" at last said the young voice pleadingly, while the pale little face was turned anxiously to the shore, "Harold! can't you help me?"

Harold was paralyzed. He could neither speak nor stir, but stood with wild straining eyes watching the child drifting ever downward with the stream.

"Harold! Harold!" came the boy's voice again, no longer audacious and exultant, but with the shrill ring of terror in it: "Harold! come and help me! come and help me!"

Harold's first numbness had passed now, and he was as excited as he had been inert. Had he waited to reflect, he would probably have been more frightened than even the drowning boy; but, like many timid people, his very fear took away his power of calculating chances and so led him into greater danger. Though unable to swim, he plunged into the river, made up to the child, and after a little while of difficulty—he never knew how he accomplished it, nor why he and Franky were not both drowned together, nor indeed what he did, nor how the thing went at all—he found himself in shoal water, holding the boy in his hand, and soon after was on dry land. And then the strain relaxed, and he sat down on the shore stones and fainted.

Little Frank, crying now lustily and thoroughly terrified, ran and stumbled back to the mother and the rest; and, as the Shenstones did all things noisily and with large demonstration, his sobs and cries were soon heard all over the wood, bringing the young lovers from their respective paradises and waking them somewhat rudely from their dreams.

Edith was the first to comprehend what the boy said. The rest were safely gathered there; only Harold was missing; and her heart and eyes enlightened each other. At first, seeing Franky's distress and his wet and dripping state, she thought that Harold was drowned, and that the child had tried to save him; but she made out at last "White Reach" and "shore," and without waiting to hear more, ran off down the river side, Fred following her, begging her not to be afraid—*he* was with her.

It took her but a few moments to be by her brother's side—chafing his cold hands, kissing his pale lips, calling to him with every endearing epithet love ever gave to speech, doing her sweetest best to bring him back to life and consciousness again; all the while a secret sense of her own neglect busy at the heart, which made her feel herself his murderer—as if to her had been owing the chance, and therefore the responsibility, of his danger. How selfish she had been! she kept thinking, as the tears fell fast from her eyes. She

had let herself be wiled away by the pleasant sunshine and Fred Shenstone's pleasanter talk, and had neglected her dear brother who had always been so near and dear to her—who had always been her care, even as her father was her mother's! If he died now, if he was already dead, it was her fault; and she would have been his murderer.

And then she flung herself across his breast, and nearly suffocated him in her anguish of self-reproach and her dread of his decease. She would have suffocated him in all probability had not Fred lifted her up by main force from where she lay, and told her laconically and practically enough that a fellow fainting could not breathe if a weight was on his chest—taking the method of reviving on himself, which ended by Harold's coming out of his swoon and looking about him, at the first bewildered enough, but soon getting back to his usual state of consciousness—which he best evidenced, poor lad, by bursting into tears and weeping on Edith's neck hysterically.

And now the hour of his triumph began—that long-dreamed-of-hour which he had only desired and had never dared to hope, wherein he was the hero and beloved, and given the foremost place; set above them all—set above Fred and Craven and Rupert, big fellows as they were, who had always despised him and laughed at him. None of them had done what he had

done to-day—none of them had saved Franky from drowning at the risk of being drowned themselves. Oh, what a delicious moment this was! it was worth all he had suffered to come into this heaven of praise and pride! Mabel, that darling Mabel, who was more than a crowned queen to him and whose smile was worth a royal decoration—Mabel herself went up to him and put her arms about his neck, and frankly kissed him, Craven standing by. Mrs. Shenstone—who somehow was more motherly to him than his own mother—she kissed him again and again more lovingly than she was wont to kiss even her own boys. Edith kissed him, in between each fresh relay, like the chorus in a Greek play striking in between the speakers; and all the girls kissed him too. The amount of kissing bestowed by them on him and Franky was simply wonderful; and the sickly, sensitive, imaginative boy went straight away into fairyland, and forgot that this was only earth after all, and that Craven Seymour hated to see him about Mabel, and that Edith loved Fred Shenstone better than she loved him, and that he was below even the girls in pluck and capacity, and that he had ever wept for shame at his own shortcoming. He forgot all but the charm of his present triumph and the exquisite delight of being praised and beloved.

The Shenstones were people who never forgot a

favour. They were notorious for their amount of gratitude for any kindness done to them. They who lived in doing kindly graces to others and who were of that easy, affluent nature which needs but little good done to itself, made one who served them in ever so small a matter a debtor rather than creditor by the generosity of their gratitude, the wealth of their obligation. This act of Harold's in rescuing their boy bound them to the Lanfears for ever. So they said; and they were people to be believed in what they said.

"I shall never forget what you have done for us, Harold," said Mr. Shenstone, with almost a tremor in his full, jocund voice. "Whatever I can do for you, remember, you have only to ask and it is yours. I can never forget to-day."

"No, we can never forget it, my dear," added Mrs. Shenstone tenderly. "You have saved the life of our son, and now you are our son yourself. I cannot say more than that, my dear."

"You have said more than I deserve," answered Harold bashfully; "I do not deserve half you have said."

"Pooh! pooh!" laughed Mr. Shenstone, a little more boisterously perhaps than was necessary, to hide the emotion he would have been ashamed to show. "When you are a father yourself, Har, you will know what it

is to have a boy saved from drowning! There is nothing like experience to make us understand the feelings of others! And to think that you, who are not up to us in physique, should have been the one to save a son of mine!"

Mr. Shenstone spoke in as much astonishment as anything else. It was the lion and the mouse over again—the pigmy to help and the giant to fail; and he could not get over his surprise that Harold Lanfear, of all people in the world, should have saved a son of his—that one of those young Anakites of whom he was so proud should owe absolute life and preservation to a nerveless stripling with muscles like so much wadding, and whose bones, he used to say, were no bigger than a fowl's drumsticks. It was a very natural surprise and not ungenerously expressed; and perhaps Harold shared it in his secret heart in the midst of all his pride and pleasure. But it did not weaken Mr. Shenstone's gratitude; and again and again he said that he was now the Lanfears' debtor for life, and that he should think no return too much to make for this great, this unspeakable, obligation.

And when he said this Fred suddenly felt his cheeks flame, as if a fire had passed over them; but he said nothing, and his heightened colour escaped notice from all but Mabel; who held her tongue about it—which, for a Shenstone, was a rather remarkable occurrence.

But the bad quarter of an hour, which has to come after all pleasure, came for Harold surely enough. In the evening he was in a high fever, and by the next morning he was delirious. A feeble organization such as his could bear neither the excitement nor the exposure which he had undergone, and his heroic chants had to be set in a minor key for many a long day to come. There was no help for it; he was evidently in for a serious illness; so, with some annoyance as well as pain, Amy delivered him into Edith's hands as her especial care and charge, and sent off at once for the doctor. Early in the day therefore, Mr. James Bent, of the square house at the north end of the village, drove down to Rosehill, and asked to see the sick boy of whose heroism the whole village was ringing with such echo as can be got out of barely three score souls of limited intelligence and defective education.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE GLOAMING.

Alton Roadend was by no means satisfied with its latest comers. The mystery about them displeased the aborigines not a little, and gave rise to all sorts of surmises, of which the least ill-natured was that Charley Lanfear was insane. For what else could it be, said the people, that kept a gentleman as close as if he had been a prisoner? There was nothing to be afeard on at Roadend; and he wasn't in such poor trim like as he couldn't face the free air; what could it be then but a little bit softness with him or his lady—a slate off as a body might say? The young people were all there, though Master Lanfear he was but poor-looking; still they were right enough for the matter of that, and went about like other folks; and the lady, she could hold her own pretty stiff when she'd a mind; so it must be the gentleman—it was tied to be him.

And thus the insanity of poor soft Charley grew to be an article of social faith at Alton Roadend, based on the seclusion in which he lived and which had increased since Mrs. Shenstone spoke of her cousin

Laura Mason's boy, and how she herself was a Farmer by birth.

Mr. James Bent was one of those who most firmly believed in this theory of Mr. Lanfear's madness. True, he went only on conjecture, for he had not seen Charley, so that he could not judge even by eyesight. Being one of those men who always relegate their minor social duties of to-day to the action of to-morrow, he had put off his initiatory visit to the new comers till time had rolled on so far, and neglected courtesies had accumulated so thickly, he did not like to face the ghosts he himself had called up. Therefore, all that he had seen of the elder Lanfears was by chance meetings at times when he was coming home from his more distant patients, and they were walking in the dusk of the evening with the bats and the owls. And not even Mr. Bent, for all that he had the keen vision of a sporting doctor, could make out very distinctly what manner of face it was that looked furtively at him as he passed, from under the broad-leafed hat which was almost as good a disguise as a mask would have been. Amy's face he had seen often plainly enough; indeed, she always showed hers, not only without concealment, but with a challenge for observation, as if to attract inconvenient attention from her husband, as if even in this making herself his guardian and his shield. Thus Charley Lanfear was practically unknown to Mr. Bent,

and when the doctor called to see the sick boy, perhaps his most distinct thought was: "Well, at last I shall see the mysterious stranger! I wonder what he is like!"

His visit however, brought him no nearer acquaintance with the probable lunatic, who, perhaps in proof of his lunacy, had always an uneasy feeling about this Roadend doctor and a kind of vague imagination that he had seen him somewhere before; for, as he drove up to the gate, Amy, who had been on the watch ever since he had been sent for, hastily shut the door of the back parlour where Charley was painting—his favourite and almost only occupation—saying: "I will go and see the doctor, Charley, and do you stay here. I know better than you what to tell him about Harold."

"Yes, do you go, Amy," he answered, glad to escape an irksome task. "As you say, you know better than I do what to tell him."

Upon which he settled himself to his work again quite contentedly, and Amy went out to see the doctor, carefully closing the door after her.

Mr. James Bent was one of those brown-skinned, leather-cheeked, dried-up men of forty-five who have not a trace of resemblance left with their former florid, round-faced selves of twenty—a man with whom twenty years had effected an entire transformation, so that his nearest schoolboy friends might have sat for hours in

his company without recognizing him for the "Puffy Bent" of old tradition. A terrible illness, consequent on a still more terrible sorrow, had been the cause of this entire change. He had been a brown-haired, merry-looking, fat-faced boy up to two-and-twenty, and then he went through his initiation into the anguish of a man's wasted love; and came out of it lean and angular, soon also grey-headed and bald, and with a heart almost as dry as his skin. He had one occupation—his profession, and one pleasure—sporting; but, though he was a good anatomist, a dashing operator, and a rough-and-ready, kill-or-cure practitioner generally, his real inclination was more for the stable and the kennel-yard than for the hospital, and the stud-book was a far more precious compilation to him than the pharmacopœia. He was clever though, and had one speciality—he never forgot a face. The disguises of time and the blurring effects of absence made no difference to him. He had the memory of an elephant; and once seen was always to be recognized by Mr. James Bent if by chance met with again. He was a judge of art too in his way—that came by virtue of his knowledge of form and his good perceptive faculties; and he used often to say that if he had not been a doctor he would have been either a painter or a jockey. That was meant to be a little bit of humour with him, but many people failed to see the humour, and took him literally.

When Amy entered the drawing-room, as the least dingy of the Rosehill rooms was called by courtesy, she found the strange doctor turning over a portfolio full of Charley's Australian sketches that had been left by chance on the table.

"Very fair indeed; wants force, but a capital study of colour," said Mr. Bent as she came in, and before any greetings had passed. He had an odd jerky abrupt manner, and spoke to every one, even to strangers seen for the first time, as if he had parted with them five minutes ago. He rarely said: "How do you do?" and he never shook hands. "Yours?" he added, looking up sharply from under his overhanging eyebrows.

"My husband's," said Amy, catching his tone and answering as curtly as he had asked.

"Australian I see?"

"Australian," said Amy.

"Better for colour than composition," said the doctor, making a parabola with his thumb over the horizon of a bit of bush scenery; and this time Amy did not answer.

"Out of drawing," said Mr. Bent, pointing to a kangaroo's fore-paws of defective foreshortening; "quarters too low," as he turned up the sketch of a decidedly wooden-looking hunter; "joints not properly articulated, neck too thick, pastern too high. Ah, this is better!—put to rights, a nice little beast to go," a

little more approvingly, as he made a whole series of airy parabolas over the portrait of a ewe-necked cob with a Roman nose, standing by a pea-green tree of unauthorized botanical structure.

To all of which Amy still made no reply, but stood in her concentrated intense way, watching nervously lest any word she might have to say, or any sketch that might be turned up, would lead to more than she desired to tell, or set Mr. James Bent on the track of the secret haunting her life and Charley's.

And yet she did not dare to check the man's curious pleasure in the sketches. He was evidently used to take his own way, whether it went with or against the laws of society, and she did not venture to oppose him. But she stood in torture; and wished that she could have struck the prying doctor blind. It was the consciousness of something to conceal that made her endure this pain. Had she possessed her soul in peace, and had the lines of her life been free from the sad tangle of evil in which they were now enmeshed, she would have simply told him he had been sent for other things than to criticize her husband's drawings; but the cowardice of conscience was upon her and she had to suffer in consequence.

When he had seen the last of the sketches, but not till then, Mr. Bent said abruptly: "Now, ma'am, the patient; and quick if you please. I have no time to

lose, and ought to be five miles off at this moment. Is that his voice?" as the boy's harsh tones, roughened by fever, came rasping through the air, penetrating to every corner of the small house, with Edith's softer sweeter notes striking in between—made all the softer and the sweeter by the contrast.

"Yes," said Amy; "he is delirious."

"Ah!" replied Mr. James Bent, sinking in his leathery cheeks and making a rabbit mouth, as he always did when "doing his own thinking," as he phrased it; "so I hear. No stamina to go upon," he jerked out as he strode up the stairs; "nervous development in excess of the muscular; digestive organs feeble; tendency to encephalitis at all times; in for it now," he added, as he entered the room where poor Harold lay in the tossing tumult of brain-fever, knowing nothing of life but its pain, nothing of joy but its shadow—sorrow. "Well, young lady, and so you are in charge, hey?" were his first words to Edith as she sat by the bed holding her brother's burning hand in hers. "Mustn't overdo it, you know; have a pretty long spell before you; but I'll cut it down as quick as I can for you. Still you'll have a time of it; so don't spend all your strength at the first burst."

Mr. James Bent was one of those doctors who treat disease as an impersonate enemy with whom they have

a hand to hand contest, wherein the victory brings the same kind of glory to the victor as with two men in a prize-fight or two runners in a race. There was no modest idea of "assisting Nature" with him; it was a simple stand-up fight between disease and skill; and if he saved his patient then his skill got all the credit and poor Nature was just a kitchen-wench who had done as she was bid, and had scoured out her pots and pans according to orders, and without a will of her own in the matter. As a natural consequence of this rather ferocious personality he cared only for severe cases; long constitutional dragging diseases were uninteresting to him, however wearisome to the patient; and he despised all the class of "bread-pill practitioners," as he called them, who cared to assuage suffering as well as to preserve life. With him it was only the preservation of life that roused him; and then he was energetic enough.

As this case of Harold's was severe, he paid him unremitting attention and threw his whole soul into saving a life which he declared twenty times a day was not worth the powder and shot spent upon it. "A poor miserable creature," he used to say; "not worth the clothes he stands upright in!"

But the doctor's instinct was stronger than the man's contempt, so he worked away at the boy till he "pulled him through," according to his own mode of expression,

and brought him out of the stage of fever and delirium into that of languor and debility, from the bed to the easy chair before the open window, where, propped up with pillows and covered with shawls, he could look into the garden and dream away his shadowy days of convalescence.

Yet during all this time of sickness and danger—of almost ferocious professional zeal; with visits paid to the cottage twice and sometimes three times a day—Mr. James Bent had not once seen the face of, nor spoken with, Charley Lanfear. Amy he saw every time he called; and Edith of course—was she not her brother's nurse?—but the father was invisible, though always asked for; and Mr. James Bent was consequently more than ever convinced that he was a harmless lunatic, whose madness his family very naturally sought to conceal from the eyes of the outside world; and that some day or other he should be called in to quell a fit of acute mania, and then the whole mystery would be exploded.

"Lord keep the sly silly folk!" as he said one day to Amy; "as if anything in this world was ever kept secret yet! Secret, ma'am? I tell you there are no secrets! the only question is the degree of notoriety!"

And perhaps he was not so far wrong.

All through these long weeks Edith had attended to her brother righteously, exclusively; consequently

she had seen nothing of the Shenstones, save when Mabel or Rosa, or dear Mrs. Shenstone, called at Rosehill to see how "poor Harold" was getting on. For naturally they took the cause of his illness to themselves, and thought it was simply due to the excitement of saving little Franky from becoming a water-baby prematurely. But her turn for a little consideration came now—though her mother did not seem to see that she needed any at all—and Mr. Bent, who had watched her gradually droop and decline more and more as time wore on, at last insisted so warmly on her having a little change, that Amy and the girl herself found themselves obliged to obey—the one reluctant enough to allow, and the other to accept, the indulgence. However, they were in the hands of a master whose word was law, and they soon found that, if Charley suffered himself to be managed, Mr. James Bent would not. So Mrs. Shenstone carried off Edith, at the doctor's request, to spend the afternoon and dine with them at the Hall; though Harold actually cried at the prospect of being left; though Amy said all manner of sharp sarcastic things to her daughter about weakness and self-indulgence and a woman's part in life being intended to be one of self-sacrifice and self-denial; and though too, Edith stood between them both flushed and nearly weeping herself for sorrow to see her brother's pain, and for self-reproving assent to her mother's reproaches.

But Mr. James Bent, was peremptory; Mrs. Shenstone was heartsome and loving; Mabel was girlishly determined on her own way, and her own way was to have Edith at the Hall that day; so, with these three influences at work, the girl was obliged to yield, and was driven off in the little pony carriage more happy than at peace; while Harold cried himself sick and Amy lost her temper at his unmanliness.

It was one of those warm, soft, grey days of summer time which have perhaps more tenderness, if less delight, than the more brilliantly coloured; a day without a sunset—the change from noon to evening being marked only by the deeper tints that spread themselves through the atmosphere and over the sky, by the evening song of the birds and the fuller perfume of the flowers. It was a day which rendered souls more sad than merry and more loving than either, and which a little subdued even the mighty hilarity of the Shenstones. The young ones pleaded that they wanted to sit still and read their fairy books, if one of the elders, more heroic than the rest, asked them to romp to the extent of the usual tether; but the elders, as a rule, cared rather to lounge at full length on the lawn than to rampage about as in days of more restless vitality. And this pleasant quietness at the Hall, as unwonted as pleasant, suited Edith in her present subdued frame of mind better than anything else would

have done, and made her feel more entirely one with the family than she had ever felt before—and she had been one of them from the beginning.

Quite without design, one by one the little group clustered on the lawn dropped off into other combinations, leaving Fred and Edith alone. They were sitting on the garden chair placed beneath the old black cedar, flowers at their feet and the soft warm evening air coming softly on their young cheeks. Before them lay the rich plain, shadowed with the mystery of wood, green with fertile pastures, feathered with fruitful grain ripening into tracts of gold in preparation for its final use—an image of human life to those who could read it aright, and full of that vague suggestiveness which at such a moment is more precious than more distinct imagery. It was all vague and undetermined from first to last. Fred had not the conscious self-control of a man who says just what he means and who has laid down the chart of his course from the beginning; and Edith had not the self-possession of a woman who knows what she has to expect and who has rehearsed her part more than once before. Both were young and inexperienced; both drifted; both were carried away; and before they well understood their own position or had considered their responsibilities, the ineffaceable word which may be recalled but which cannot be destroyed had been spoken, and Edith woke

from her confused confession of love to find Fred Shenstone's arm about her waist and both her hands clasped tightly in his.

So now the thing, which might have been foreseen from the beginning, had not the one house been blinded by fear and the other by carelessness, had come to pass; and Fred Shenstone, the eldest son of the old county family of Alton Roadend, and Edith Lanfear, the daughter of Charley Lanfear—from Australia—were engaged together; with cousin Laura Mason in the background—and Alick Farmer capable of turning up at any time. Happily for the young creatures themselves, they were ignorant of the thorns and tangles ahead, and with the presumptuous courage of youth believed that everything would be as clear as their own consciences and as bright as their own love. They knew nothing of the sword of Damocles; and therefore feared nothing. It would be time enough for them to see the steel when they felt the edge.

Nothing was said at this moment to the Hall authorities, Fred only insisting, in a very positive manner, on taking Edith home; which might have been hint enough had they been people capable of taking hints from anyone. But they were dense in all such matters; totally unsuspicious; always unprepared; people to whom the various chapters of their children's histories would come like thunderbolts, as unforeseen

and as amazing—people who would not have read a word of the Sibyl's books, though laid open before their eyes and spelt out for them as they went on. When Fred, flushed and a little more dictatorially than was quite becoming had it not been excusable from that strange feeling of pride, that sentiment of power and possession which comes with a youth's first love accepted, said in a quick masterful way, quite unlike his usual way, that "he would take Miss Lanfear home; Rupert and the rest need not trouble themselves about what was no concern of theirs,"—Mrs. Shenstone merely looked up with her sunny face smiling at her boy's impetuosity, and said: "Very well, Fred; as you like, dear; but you need not be so fierce, child!" laughing at the idea of a Shenstone's ferocity.

Too happy, and too strange yet to their happiness to be at ease together as Mabel and Craven would have been, Fred and Edith walked along the darkening lane that led from the Hall to Rosehill, for the most part in silence—their new delight needing no spur of speech, and indeed unable to bear it. They only cared to know their love, they did not care yet to dissect it; besides, silence was to them as eloquent as words. If they had been asked, they would have said they had talked all the way; and fancy answered the purpose quite as well as fact would have done.

However, silent or loquacious, they arrived at last at

the garden gate of Rosehill, and both made the same exclamation at the same moment: "How short it has been!" It seemed to both that their slow transit of a mile had occupied about five minutes of time.

And here Fred stood with Edith's hands in his, lingering before the inevitable parting came.

"I will not come in to-night, Edith, to speak to your father," he said; "I will ride over to-morrow and see him."

"Very well," said Edith shyly. She would have said "very well," and as shyly, had he proposed the contrary.

Standing then in the twilight, hand in hand, his eyes fixed on her lovingly as he stood with bent head but with nothing shrinking in his attitude, while she, with her face slightly turned away, had yet the manner of giving herself to him, Charley and Amy came suddenly upon them, as they were setting out for a lonely ramble through the fields, where they were least likely to meet any one. Harold had been put to bed and was now asleep; so that they could leave the cottage for an hour, sure that Edith would return soon. At a glance they both comprehended what the Shenstones had failed to see.

Edith blushed and started as they came through the gate upon them, then turned her happy eyes, dark and tender with love, on her mother, beseechingly. It

was the moment of all in her life when she most needed a mother's sympathy—the moment which brings mother and daughter nearest together while seeming to divide them.

In all other circumstances she would have looked instinctively to the father; but now she turned to Amy and held out one hand to her—Fred still keeping the other.

A spasm of pain convulsed Amy's face. She herself had thrown these two young creatures into what of danger and despair this moment inaugurated; she alone was to blame, though they must be the sufferers! She could not openly refuse her sanction to what was such a blessed chance for Edith, yet she could neither sympathize nor consent. She looked away from her daughter. Hard as she was and as she had nerved herself to be, she could not meet that fond and pleading glance, knowing all that she knew, but turned her wan eyes wistfully on her husband. As he looked at her to ask her counsel, he met only instead a half-terrified glance and the deep distraction of fear. Poor weak Charley! He knew his wife's face well enough to see that he must not commit himself, and yet his heart was full of love and sympathy, of pity for Edith should all this prove delusion, and a yearning wish that it might grow into a truth. Tears were in his eyes as Edith went up to him and laid her hands in his,

mutely asking him for his consent. She longed so earnestly for a loving word from them, and they stood there so dumb, and her mother so cold and death-like!

"My poor Edith!" said Charley impulsively; and, taking off his hat, he kissed her.

Edith flung herself in his arms. "Dear, dear papa!" she said, clinging to him; "you have made me so happy!"

"You forget your brother in your selfish pleasures," said Amy's harsh voice sternly. "Have you no thought for him now, Edith?"

"Oh yes, mamma! indeed I have. No, I could never forget Harold!" said Edith tenderly.

"It seems as if you have!" replied the mother, "You have been so long away that he has made himself quite ill with fretting after you."

"I will go to him now," said Edith, looking at Fred. At that moment Mr. James Bent came riding past the gate, and drew up suddenly; and as he drew up, Fred took Edith's hand again in his, and, by way of keeping her safe from the heels of the horse, put his arm round her waist and kept it there.

"How's the boy?" asked the doctor, abruptly. "By George! Mr. Lanfear at last!" he added, as he threw himself from his horse and strode up to Charley standing still bareheaded, with his hair flung back, and his

colourless handsome face fully exposed to the last of the waning light.

Mr. Bent looked at him curiously, the overhanging brows knitted as the keen grey eyes looked him through and through.

"I have seen you before, Mr. Lanfear," he said suddenly.

Charley turned ghastly white; Amy's face hardened into its usual mask of watchful intensity. She made a few steps forward, as if she would have hidden her husband, as so often before; but Mr. Bent never once withdrew his eyes which were fastened with an almost hungry scrutiny on the pale, shrinking creature before him. Then suddenly a look of recognition came into his eyes, and saying dryly: "I remember now where I saw you, Mr. Lanfear," he mounted his horse and rode away without further greeting to anyone, full of trouble at the knowledge which this meeting had brought.

"I thought I knew him," he muttered to himself as he rode through the lane. "I saw him at Millbank when I had the prisoners during Morley's illness. He was down with jaundice and was in for forgery. I remember it all now—lawyer's clerk; forged the will of an old gentleman in the country; motive a little dark; and got twenty years' transportation. And that girl of his with young Shenstone! What ought I to do, I wonder? Give Shenstone a hint, or hold my tongue

and let the poor devil have a chance? Deuced awkward, whatever I do! I wish to the mischief I had never seen him, and knew nothing about him, one way or the other. But that does not help me; and what on earth ought I to do?"

So Amy in running away from one danger had fallen full on another, and one more serious than that from which she had escaped; finding, when too late, that fate is not to be balked of her prey by fear; and that, how swift soever the flight of the sinner, the footsteps of Nemesis are swifter still.

CHAPTER V.

THE SERPENT IN EDEN.

"MATER," said Fred when he had got home, "I have something to tell you."

He spoke in a moved voice for all his efforts to conceal anything like emotion, and he kissed his mother with effusive tenderness.

They were sitting together by the open window, looking out into the darkness; the only lights being the glowworms scattered about the lawn, and here and there the twinkle of a cottage window in the near distance.

"Yes, dear," said his mother, settling her cap which Fred always ruffled unmercifully. "What is it? Why, you are quite pale, child! what is the matter?" she added with an anxious accent.

"Nothing very terrible, dear; I am only going to give you another daughter; that is all," said Fred straightforwardly, though he had to clear his voice before he spoke.

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Mrs. Shenstone, opening her eyes very wide.

"I am engaged to Edith Lanfear," returned her son with a plunge.

"Good gracious, Fred, you don't say so!" Mrs. Shenstone rose bolt upright to her feet in her amazement. "Engaged to Edith? I never thought of such a thing! It never entered into my head for a moment! Why, what will papa say? You are such a boy, Fred; such a mere baby yet!"

"Two-and-twenty is not quite a baby, mater!" laughed Fred. He a baby! in his own esteem scarcely below Nestor in experience, and capable of giving lessons on the true science of life to his father himself; was he not a Youth of the Period?

"It seems only the other day that you were in the cradle, like little Gertrude there," said the mother thoughtfully; "and now you are talking of marrying and settling like an old man. How time passes! how soon it will all be over!"

"Not of marrying and settling just yet, dear," Fred answered, the accurate masculine mind gently correcting the excesses of feminine exaggeration. "I shall have to wait for that until I have something of my own to marry on. I have taken only the first step, and by no means expect to be at the top of the hill all at once. Indeed, I have not thought of anything beyond how much I love Edith, and how happy—more than happy—I am that she loves me."

"I wonder what papa will say!" repeated Mrs. Shenstone, with the same unusual thoughtfulness still upon her.

"Why, what can he say?" asked her son hurriedly.

"I don't know, dear; I only wonder," was her answer.

"What do you think yourself, mater? He has always seemed to like Edith; surely he cannot object to her now!"

"So he has, dear, and so have we all; but liking a nice girl about the house and choosing her for a daughter-in-law are different things you see, Fred," the mother said with a quite wonderful display of logic.

"I do not think he *can* object," reiterated Fred. "What is there that anyone could dislike in Edith? the loveliest and best girl that was ever born! so pretty, so clever, so good too, with no nonsense about her; there is really nothing to find fault with in her! The governor would be hard to please if he was not pleased with her!"

"No one could find fault with her personally, dear," said his mother soothingly; "but"—with a perplexed look and manner—"we know so little of the family. They came here without introductions, and we visited them; of course it was our duty to do so; but to visit and ask to one's house—after all, Fred, that is nothing—but for one's son to marry among them, that is very different. Confess now yourself, what do we know of

them that would make us ready to receive them into our family? And then Mr. Lanfear is so strange!—and you know, dear, you belong to one of the first families in the county, and you, as the eldest son, ought to mind what you are about when you marry. Don't you see all this for yourself?"

"Yes, mother, and I would be the last man in the world to introduce anyone who was not worthy to you or the girls; but Edith Lanfear! she is a girl anyone would be proud of; she is fit to be a queen, mater!" very warmly; "and I hold that she honours me by accepting me."

"Yes, dear, I daresay; and I am sure I love her too; she is a dear, sweet child; but then her father is so queer, Fred. Of course it may be all right; but he is certainly very odd—and anything of that kind would be so dreadful!"

Mrs. Shenstone said this as vaguely as anxiously. It was not that she had any definite suspicions about Charley Lanfear's mind, morals or career; she knew neither what she feared nor what she suspected; it was simply that now, when asked to join forces together, she felt more keenly than she had ever felt before the unsatisfactory nature of their knowledge and what terrible possibilities might lie behind their ignorance.

"Anything of what kind, mater?" asked Fred.

"I don't know, dear—anything," was her not very perspicacious answer.

"He is shy and reserved, undoubtedly, but that is all," said Fred stoutly. "There is nothing so unusual in that, dear mater; and surely nothing wrong. You should see some fellows at our college, as surly as bears and as morose as wolves. Oh no; there is nothing at all unusual in a man's being shy and reserved!" added Fred Shenstone, with a look of boundless confidence in the wholesome integrity of Charley Lanfear's life.

"Well, dear, I do not say anything, you know; it may be all right," said Mrs. Shenstone with a pretty mixture of tenderness and doubt; "I do not pretend to know much of the ways of the world myself, but you and your father can settle it. And what he approves of, of course I shall too, my dear."

"He cannot disapprove of it," repeated Fred. "He is too just for that. I am sure he will love Edith like his own daughter; I am sure of it, mater."

"For your sake I hope he will, dear," said Mrs. Shenstone.

At this moment Mr. Shenstone came in from the library where he had been indulging in the harmless belief that, dozing in his high-backed chair with his legs under the table, he was overlooking some parochial work that needed a master's eye and a competent knowledge of arithmetic. He made heroic efforts to meet the lamplight unblinkingly, thus insinuating that he had been sitting in the full blaze of his moderator for

an hour or more; but he looked undeniably sleepy for all his efforts.

"Here is your father, Fred," then said Mrs. Shenstone; "you can speak to him."

"Speak to me, boy, about what?" said the merry rolling voice a little drowsily; "what's in the wind now, Fred?"

And Fred repeated his formula to his father, perhaps with just a shade less confidence as to how it would be received, though with no less steadiness of manner than when he first broke ground with his mother; her very slender opposition having opened his eyes to the fact that perhaps after all there was something in the Lanfear family a little unlike ordinary respectable middle-class folk as generally found in English country villages.

"God bless my soul!" said Mr. Shenstone; "who would have thought of such a thing?"

"Well, you see, sir, I did," answered Fred.

"Yes, you did, and all very natural and right in your own eyes, I dare say; but we know so little of the family, boy," said Mr. Shenstone, unconsciously repeating his wife's words. "As friends and playfellows with you children, the young people were all very well and always heartily welcome; but as our sons and daughters, that alters the case! Hay, Mar, what do you say?"

"Yes, it does," said Mar obediently, but adding nothing of her own to strengthen the case against her boy.

"There is only one daughter, sir, and not much likelihood of a son in Harold," said Fred mathematically.

"Ah, poor Harold! he is not likely for much in any way," exclaimed Mr. Shenstone with a pitying kind of contempt. "He was always a poor creature, but now he is deplorable."

"Yes, since his last illness he has been bad enough," said Fred; "I do not think he will ever quite get over it. But he was not so bad before he got that wetting in saving Franky. And, after all, sir, he may be weak and nervous, and all that; but it was a plucky thing to do."

The father and mother looked at each other.

"That's true," said Mr. Shenstone; "we undoubtedly owe him our boy's life."

And then there was a pause, during which Mr. Shenstone sat drumming with his fingers on the table, more perplexed than he had ever been before; his wife looking first at him and then at her son, as consideration for the family name or sympathy with young love was uppermost.

But Fred began to feel a little more sure now as to the way the thing would turn. He knew the lavish

gratitude of his people; he remembered the warmth with which his father had promised anything—everything—to the Lanfear family in return for Franky's life; he had heard their almost self-reproachful regrets for Harold's illness daily repeated, and had seen their loving attention throughout as a kind of conscience-fee incumbent on them to pay; and he reasoned out their assent to his marriage with Edith—Harold's sister—as the logical consequence of all this grateful fervour; and if they cooled or slackened he knew how to stir them up again with more direct reminders.

He reasoned aright. Little inclined at any time to oppose their children's wishes, fond of Edith, easy, indulgent and morally indolent, they could not have made a very stout fight of it had they even wished to do so; but when they were swayed by the memory of Harold's good deed towards them, as well as by love for their boy whom they had never thwarted yet and would scarcely like to begin now on a matter so near and dear to him, the objections they could have made glibly enough faded away as soon as formed; and with a hearty: "Well, Fred, you are of age to choose for yourself, so it must be as you like," Mr. Shenstone dropped the slight guard that hitherto he had maintained, and Fred was the master of the situation:—free to make Edith Lanfear his wife so soon as there was a reasonable prospect of paying the butchers' and bakers' bills in their order.

"If you love her, dear Fred, so do we all," was Mrs. Shenstone's final saying; "all I can promise is, that she shall find a mother in me and have a child's place in my heart, and that she shall never regret the day when she came among us."

So now the thing was settled; and by breakfast-time next morning all the servants and all the children knew that Fred and Edith were engaged, and that some day Edith would come and live at the Hall and never leave it again. So that question drifted into safe harbourage at the Hall, and the Shenstones dismissed from their minds all uneasiness respecting the Lanfear family; being people who did not do things by halves and who were besides too easy-going to regret anything when once arranged. Thus, where opposition might have been looked for, was only smooth sailing; but where it was apparently the greatest good fortune that could have befallen the house, there was the most bitter distress, and breakers ahead likely to swamp both hope and happiness for ever.

"What shall we do, Charley?" cried Amy, wringing her hands as she paced through and through the narrow room. "I ought to have foreseen it; and yet if I had, how could I have prevented it? It was an evil day when I suffered the acquaintance; but all my days are evil!" she added passionately.

It was not often she gave way to bursts of anguish

like this; but this was not her husband's affair, as all her other difficulties had been. For him she must be ever reticent, ever strong, bearing all and showing nothing; here she might relax and let her agony be seen.

"Poor Edith!" said Charley tenderly; "must it really be prevented, Amy?"

"Can you ask?" she said, in a voice half sad, half reproachful.

"But nothing will ever come out," maundered Charley. "We are safe here, Amy; no one knows us; and how can we be found out, living as we do under another name? We can live and die here in peace, and let Edith be happy."

"How can you say that?" cried Amy; "who is ever safe? We never know when we may not be tracked; besides, have you forgotten Mrs. Shenstone's name, Charley, and her cousin Laura Mason?"

"But Edith will break her heart," urged the father pityingly.

"What are women sent into the world for but to suffer?" cried Amy. "Edith has to bear her cross, as we all must—as I have had to bear mine. There is no help for it; life is cruel to us and we are too weak to resist."

This was Amy's one fixed thought and the principle on which her own life had been based. She and Edith were the female martyrs of circumstances—born to

suffer, the one for her husband, the other for her brother—martyrs whose only inheritance was pain.

"But she is so young," pleaded Charley.

"And I was young too," answered his wife, looking at him fixedly.

"Yes, I know, dear; I can never forget all that you have borne," said Charley with a humbled look.

Any allusion from Amy to what she had endured for love of him always touched him at once.

"Believe me, harsh as it may seem, it is best she should suffer now instead of later," continued Amy. "It is better to bear the pain of losing a lover than to be despised by a husband when the truth is known."

"Why should it be known?" again insisted Charley; "I do not see why you should be always saying it will all come out," he added peevishly. "If it is to come out, what use is there in taking all these precautions? We might as well face the world at first instead of at last. At least we hould not have to live in perpetual fear as we do now; we should gain by telling the truth —we should, Amy."

"Gain by facing the world? gain by telling the truth? Are you mad, Charley?" cried Amy passionately. "Very well—tell if you like! tell the Shenstones, tell Edith, if you like, and you will see how right I am. Do you think that she would ever consent to marry that young Shenstone if she knew

the true history of her father? No; she would feel as I do, that it would be a dishonour on her part to take dishonoured blood into a respectable family. She could not marry him then; and she must not now."

"This is the hardest punishment of all," said Charley in a low voice; "I had better die out of the way of all of you. I have ruined you, Amy, and now I am to ruin Edith. Poor Edith! my poor Edith!"

He crossed his arms on the table; leaning his head upon them, he broke down utterly, sobbing with the helpless remorse of the weak man whose sin is brought home to him in the sorrow of those whom he loves.

His wife stood by him, her pinched and careworn face contracted with pain but her fibrous tenacity unshaken.

"She must suffer as I have suffered," she kept repeating to herself. "He must be saved, we sacrificed; it is our fate; we cannot escape from it; we were born into the world for it. Leave it to me, Charley," she then said aloud; "we can do nothing yet. We cannot oppose an engagement which is apparently such a good thing for Edith, without making them suspect that something was wrong. Leave it all to me; and if you have a daughter for whom you are sorry, Charley, remember, you have a wife as well."

These last words were said slowly, and as if she were

in pain and Charley understood them, as it was intended he should.

So the matter was left for the immediate present, and when Edith was spoken to next morning, it was coldly and guardedly—her mother's words more full of warning than of congratulations, and her father's eyes moist with tears—but not the tears of happiness.

"I advise you not to set your heart too much on this marriage," Amy said in a gloomy tone. "One never knows what may happen, and it is always wise to be prepared for the worst."

"Oh, mamma, what can happen for the worst here, if we all live?" cried Edith.

"Who knows? At all events, Edith, be advised by me, and hold your engagement loosely."

"Hold it loosely, mamma?"

Edith shrank back from her mother in a kind of horror. It seemed so infinitely shocking to her, loyal as are all the young, to be told to hold her love loosely. What could mamma mean? Surely this was not right; surely her own belief in the sacredness of her promise, and of his, was better than this doctrine of easy severance and loose holding! She looked earnestly at her mother, asking her by her face, if not in words, to unsay that cruel speech. Poor Amy! no one could read the pain of this moment to her, when her woman's wit belied her woman's heart and she preached to her

daughter a doctrine which her whole life disproved. Who had held love more sacred than she? Who had sacrificed for it more? Who had been truer, more loyal, more devoted? And yet, with her own life standing as the protest against her words, she repeated even more emphatically: "I tell you again, Edith, take my advice, and do not count too much on this engagement."

"I do not understand you, mamma," said Edith painfully.

"We all ought to be prepared for disappointments," Charley put in, in his feeble, gentle way.

"But why should I be so specially prepared now?" asked Edith with a look of terror.

"Not specially," he temporized. "Your mother meant only a general bit of advice, did you not, Amy? and perhaps it will not come true after all. Don't fret, Edith; it will all come right perhaps. God knows I hope it may!" sighing.

"Oh, papa, there is something in all this that I do not understand," said Edith; "but you will not be against me?—*you* will take my part, papa, will you not?"

Frightened and overpowered, she flung herself into his arms with a girl's yearning need for fatherly protection; feeling, as so often before, that he was a truer friend to her than was her mother, and that all that was needed between them was the leave to love and know each other.

"Go and tell your brother what has happened to you," said her mother hastily. "Your hardest task will be there; your father needs no persuasion. He has consented. Go now and see what Harold will say."

But Edith did not stir. She still clung to her father tenaciously, while he, half timidly, half impulsively, passed his hand over her shining hair while holding one of hers pressed closely to his heart.

"Don't do that," said Amy pettishly, snatching his hand from off the gracious head it was caressing. "You ruffle her hair," she then added by an afterthought.

"Oh, mamma! let papa love me!" cried Edith almost passionately; "why do you always stand between us?"

"Charley!" said Amy, touching his shoulder imperiously.

"Go now, my darling! do as your mother tells you," said Charley, loosing her hands with a start. "Go, my Edith, as your mother wishes."

"But you do love me, papa, do you not?" pleaded Edith, turning up her face to him with such a loving plaintive smile! "tell me that only once before I go!"

"Love you?" he said in a deep and tender voice; "love you, Edith? yes, I do love you!"

"Dear, darling papa! you have made me so happy!"

cried the poor girl, clasping him in her arms; "I shall not care for anything now!"

"Go and tell Harold, Edith, that you are about to leave him for Fred," said Amy very coldly; "and tell him what you have just now said to your papa, that you do not care for anything but your new toy, and that all your pretended love for your brother has been a farce."

"Not quite, mamma!" she answered; "for I love Harold, too."

"Will you do as you are told?" said her mother angrily; and Edith went as she was bidden.

Amy was right about Edith's task with her brother. The mother had been very unsympathetic and hard, the father more pained than helpful, but Harold was worse than either. When she told him that she loved Fred Shenstone and was engaged to him, he threw himself back in his chair and moaned and wept as if he had been told of a death rather than a marriage. He would not eat nor speak nor look up; but just lay there with his face buried among the pillows in such abject despair that Edith nearly broke her heart to see him, and was more than once on the point of saying: "It shall be given up, Harold; you shall not be unhappy!"

But she could not compass quite that amount of self-devotion, and for the present contented herself with telling him that nothing would ever change her to

him, and that, married or single, he should be always her Harold and she would be his Edith, just as they were now and had always been.

But her promises and her assurances did nothing; and the boy went back from that hour and drooped visibly.

Amy made the most of the change. She was for ever saying to Edith how pale and distressed he looked, and she was sure she did not know what she could do with him when Edith left. He would die—that was in fact all that could be looked for; his pain would not last long, and Edith might enjoy her grandeur and happiness without interruption—unless indeed remorse might be called an interruption. But perhaps she would have no remorse. She had shown herself utterly selfish in this engagement, and it was not likely that she would ever be anything else now. She had cared only for her own pleasure—for no person in the world but herself; and if they all died it would make no difference to her, so long as she got what she wanted and made herself comfortable.

It was a hard time for poor Edith. Her brother's distress, her mother's reproaches, her father's evident fear of something undefined—they were poor congratulations on the happiness of her young love! Girl-like, she had always fancied that a happy love must necessarily be a happy life. She had never thought that

it might bring about the deepest misery; and that, with an engagement to a man dearly loved standing clear and confessed, and her adoption into a worthy family very hearty and unreserved, she might have the worst troubles she had ever known in her life, and where least foreseen and most inexplicable.

The Shenstones too, saw that something unsatisfactory was in the Lanfear background; but they left things to clear themselves, as was their way, and declined to touch mysteries which they did not understand. And as Fred and Edith were content with each other they thought the rest might go as it liked, seeing that so much at least was snatched out of the general discomfort.

One day, not long after their engagement, Fred and Edith were walking in the Hall garden together. The children all kept away from them now, as partly mysterious in their condition, partly stupid in their behaviour—anyhow as utterly uncongenial to the usual run of things Shenstonian, and to be dismissed in consequence as Mabel and Craven had been dismissed before them. So they were left to dwell in their own foolishness for the most part undisturbed; with Love as the angel to guide them on the unaccustomed ways. They were walking now under the lime trees, where the "shooting gallery" was held; but they would have said, if asked, that they were walking in one of the

alleys of the Garden of Eden never dreaming of the serpent—when the gate-bell rang, and a carriage drove up the long sweep and rattled to the hall-door, like a carriage driving there by right. A smart, well-knit, brisk young man of middle age and fine artistic preservation, got out, and asked for the family with breezy familiarity; then, turning to the garden, spied out Fred beneath the limes with Edith in loverlike attitude on his arm, and came tripping down the terrace-steps to meet him.

"Well Fred, my boy, and how are you?" he said airily.

"Well, cousin Alick, and how are you?" said Fred, with less than the usual amount of Shenstone heartiness. "And where do you come from?"

"Everywhere, my boy! Italy, France, Vienna, Berlin —everywhere! Seeing life and enjoying it! You the same? By the look of things, yes," with a sharp glance to Edith.

The young man's face flushed. "And I the same in my way, I suppose," he said, with a creditable assumption of carelessness that somehow did not look very natural. "I am fond of the old college, as you know."

"Of the old college? Yes; I suppose you are, and of some young things too—eh, Fred?" interrupted cousin Alick.

"And of some young things too," Fred answered steadily. "Miss Lanfear, my cousin Alick Farmer."

Cousin Alick bowed faintly. "Lanfear? Lanfear?" he said. "What Lanfear, may I ask?"

"I am sure I don't know," laughed Fred. "What Lanfear?" to Edith, merely as a joke. "Do you date from Julius Cæsar or William the Conqueror?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Edith, laughing in her turn. "I do not know where papa and mamma came from originally—London, I think; but I don't know."

"Mother's name Amy?" asked Alick, with his head very much on one side and speaking in a queer, confidential kind of voice.

"Yes," said Edith.

"Father's Charley?"

"Yes."

"Been in Australia?"

"Yes, we were born there, my brother and I."

"Just so! What I imagined. Well! give them my compliments, will you, young lady? and say that Mr. Alick Farmer will do himself the pleasure of calling on them to-morrow. You will not forget the name. Alick Farmer!" with emphasis.

"No, I shall not forget it, and I will tell them," answered Edith innocently.

Mr. Farmer was full of politeness after this, and

paid Edith immense attention—indeed rather more than Fred quite liked; for, though cousin Alick owned to forty-five, which presupposed a year or two more, he was by way of being a young man yet, and much more the rival than the senior of the Shenstone boys. And Fred, though too healthy to be jealous by nature, was so by age—as what youth of two and twenty is not?—and was perfectly sure that cousin Alick, and every one else for the matter of that, must admire Edith as much as he did and must desire her love as ardently. Wherefore he was at any moment ready for a fight for her with the whole world—hackles up and quills on end, bristling at all points; and at this moment specially prepared for a fight with cousin Alick, who showed a great deal too plainly how much he admired his Edith and how tranquilly assured he was of being admired in return.

But Edith did not like him. Perhaps it was because he knew her parents—perhaps it was because his compliments annoyed Fred—perhaps her unspoiled instincts showed him in his true light; or, with the keen sense of souls in danger perhaps she was conscious of the coming trouble. Who can tell what subtle influences stir thoughts and feelings? Whatever the cause, there stood the fact—she did not like cousin Alick Farmer, and felt perplexed and saddened by his presence. Soon after dinner she went home, Fred accompanying her,

reaching Rosehill at the usual time just as the twilight closed in on the day.

She found her father and mother sitting, as they often did at twilight, in the small back parlour without a light. They were painful people at all times; and this melancholy kind of twilight solitude just suited them. It was so dark inside the house that Edith could not see their faces when she entered; and, had it not been that she had something to tell, she would not have gone into their room at all. For one thing specially held to in the odd, unfamiliar life which they made with their children, was a separate sitting-room of their own, where Edith and Harold only went under certain conditions, and never without knocking.

"Mamma," said the girl as she entered—she too a little excited, if unpleasantly, at the strange fact of a visitor to come who knew her parents; "I have met some one at the Hall who knows you and papa."

"What!" screamed Mrs. Lanfear, flinging up her voice.

"Yes; Fred's cousin—Mrs. Shenstone's cousin, rather," said Edith. "A Mr. Alick Farmer. He told me to tell you that he would call on you to-morrow; he knew me by my name."

"My God! it has come at last!" said Charley.

Then he slipped heavily from his chair and fell in a swoon on the floor.

"Leave the room, Edith," said Amy harshly, as she flung away her hands from her fainting father. "You have done mischief enough, I hope. Leave the room, I say. You have killed your father!"

The serpent had glided into Eden in good earnest now—sorrow on sorrow to the poor young Adam and Eve of the garden!

CHAPTER VI.

TRUTH AT ANY PRICE.

Cruel as sin, sure as death, the next morning early Cousin Alick Farmer stood at the little gate of Rose-hill, his hat slightly on one side, switching his light riding-whip as he patted his mare's moist nose and soothed her rather fidgety temper by the stock endearments of the stable. He stood there waiting for some one to relieve him of his animal, with serene assurance that his victims could make no escape this time. The game was trapped, and flight or fight was alike impossible. They might delay as long as they would—it must come at last; and if they chose to prolong the agony of anticipation, that was their affair, not his. So he waited serenely enough, caressing his mare and humming opera-tunes in between whiles, till at last the servant girl came to the gate, and Mr. Alick Farmer passed up the gravel-walk.

Both Amy and Charley felt more like wild beasts hunted to their lair than like ordinary English gentlefolks receiving an ordinary morning visitor, when the man entered their dingy house with that brisk, well-

preserved air of his, of itself enough to madden the down-trodden sufferers from sin. He looked so gay, so careless, so happy, so free from moral blame or personal shortcomings;—while poor Charley, with his lank soft hair falling over his drooping face, as if ashamed to look the world between the eyes, seemed almost to collapse as he entered, though Amy stood by, feverish, brave, defiant.

Nothing could be brighter or brisker than Mr. Alick Farmer when he entered; surely by manner the lightest-hearted fellow that ever played with life!—tossing up human crimes and tears as if they were a juggler's painted balls wherewith to make an audience merry by his dexterity.

"Well!" he said, as he came forward with both hands extended and laughing in that shallow, heartless way of his that sought to appear jocund and was only insolent—"Well! so here you are at last!"

"Yes, we are here," said Amy roughly.

"And so you slipped away after I met you, Master Charley?" continued Alick. "Why did you leave so suddenly without letting me know? It was unhandsome of you, to say the least of it, and gave me a world of trouble, not to speak of disappointment," with another taunting laugh.

"You need not go into that, Mr. Farmer," retorted Amy grimly. "Be content with what sins you carry, as it is; you need not load your soul any heavier."

"Ah! always the same, I see!—faithful and *farouche* as ever! Time, that changes all, has not changed you, Mrs.—; by the bye, Mrs. what?"

"If you know so much you know that," said Amy.

"No thanks to you, my dear lady, if I do! thanks only to my own sharp wits!" laughed Alick. "When I called at your lodgings after your very hasty hegira I could not even find the echo of your names as a clue to guide me to your retreat. The woman swore that no Mr. or Mrs. Sutton had lodged there. There had certainly been a family of Lanfears"—significantly—"charming people, but dull-like and with troubles, who had turned out the day before; but they had forgotten to leave their address behind them. So you see that was not much to go upon; but to a sharp man a straw shows the set of the current, and I was never dull. I remembered that Lanfear had been the name of my old schoolfellow's inamorata—how indeed could I ever forget Miss Amy Lanfear, that pretty, dark-eyed little fairy, who turned all our heads at Chaplin's and took captive all our hearts?" he interposed gallantly; "so I presumed," he rattled on to Charley, talking very fast and as if repeating out of book: "that, finding your own name a little the worse for wear, frayed at the edges and a trifle soiled, you had adopted your wife's as a more convenient *capuchon*. You know what a *capuchon* is, Charley?—a hood that covers face and

head, both if need be—a capital invention for delicate complexions not fitted to stand the glare of noonday. Was I right? Is it not Lanfear now; and Sutton in abeyance?—have you not adopted the *capuchon*, my boy, as the safest thing to wear, all things considered?"

Charley did not answer. He looked at Amy, waiting for her lead.

"You need not have given yourself the trouble of asking," said Amy defiantly, after a pause. "You know that we have taken the name of Lanfear; so why ask useless questions?"

"Perhaps for the pleasure of the reply," said Mr. Farmer with the same gallantry that had before offended Amy. "However, I was *bon enfant*, and did not betray you to your landlady. No good comes of useless betrayals. No good comes of uselessness in any shape—so I took my cue, thanked her, and said no more. And now again I find you in this old dog-hole, and by the merest chance in the world; a chance, Charley, which leads me to the conclusion that there is no use whatever in trying to escape Fate."

"Every one's fate is not Mr. Alick Farmer!" said Amy, insolently.

"Do what you will, go where you will," continued Mr. Farmer, taking no notice of the grim interruption; "Fate is always at your heels, dogging you like a blood-hound, and will finally win the race and pull you

down. Yes! whether it be in lodgings at Bloomsbury, or in a musty old dog-hole at Alton Roadend, depend upon it, that unconquerable bloodhound will find you out at last!"

He spoke with a light laughing insolence that sounded all the more cruel because of its unseemliness with the tragedy he was detailing. Amy thought as she clasped her small hands nervously together that any other tone, any other manner, would have been preferable to this laughing insolence—it was so full of cruel mockery, so full of heartless insult!

"You look displeased, my dear Mrs. Sutton—Lanfear, I should have said," then said Alick, in a soothing tone, taking one of her small, brown, fibrous hands caressingly; "I hope nothing that I have said has annoyed you?"

"Devil!" flashed out Amy, dashing her hand out of his grasp, while laying it on Charley's shrinking shoulder.

Mr. Farmer lifted up his eyes. "Untamable!" he said with a sigh. "You do not ask how I have found you out?" he then said after a pause. "Well, I will tell you. My sister Laura—you remember my sister Laura, Mrs. Mason?" with a laugh—"My sister Laura wrote to me the other day, and among various scraps of news specially interesting to a poor wanderer like myself, told me that our young cousin, Fred Shenstone,

was engaged to a Miss Edith Lanfear. The name struck me; and I wondered if in this Miss Edith Lanfear I should find any trace of my vanished friends of Hart-street. I came to Alton Hall; inquired; discovered; and here I am! By-the-by, Master Charley, you never told me that you had such an exquisite little Australian to show for yourself. Charming! divine! ah!" kissing his fingers—"something indeed to love! And so Fred thinks!—by all accounts a desperate case of love and truth and all the rest of it, eh?"

"It is against our wish," said Amy hastily.

Mr. Alick Farmer lifted his eyebrows a little insolently.

"So?" he said, imitating the German intonation. "Against your wish is it?"

"You need scarcely ask that, I think!" she retorted fiercely.

He bowed. It was his rôle to be maddeningly polite to Amy. In old, old times, long gone by, he used to irritate her beyond bearing by his artificial flatteries and compliments; and it pleased him to try the same game again.

"Still, in spite of your disapproval, they are engaged?" he said in an insinuating voice.

"Yes," said Amy; "you know they are."

"And you have not forbidden the banns?—even though so much against your wish?"

"On what ground could we?" retorted Amy; "on what plea possible, without telling everything?"

"Ah! that is just the test of a diplomatist," reasoned Alick Farmer. "On what grounds?—none existing they have to be created. Pleas must be furnished, whatever the workshop in which they are forged. You see, my dear friends," speaking in a quiet, logical, argumentative way, "this marriage has to be prevented, grounds or no grounds. It is all very well to keep disagreeable things dark, Charley; there you are in your right I admit; but the eldest son of the Roadend Shenstones must not marry the daughter of Charles Sutton, of the Old Bailey!"

Charley turned against him fiercely, as he had turned once before; the same fleeting flashing passion of a weak man, blazing high for a moment, then burning itself out before it had well got aflame.

"And who made me what I am?—who sent me to the Old Bailey?" he cried vehemently.

"My dear fellow, you said something like this, I remember, when we met before," said Alick calmly. "But the question of derivatives has nothing to do with the matter in hand. I take it up on social not on ethical grounds—on conventional propriety, not on elemental morality. There are hundreds of men worse than you, Charley, going before the wind with all sails set; but then you see they have not had the misfortune

to be found out; and that makes all the difference between vice and virtue, failure and success, in this world. We are all sinful creatures, I admit—mere worms!—but some of us are worms behind a royal domino and some have not even a gauze veil over our heads. Don't you see?"

"I see that you are a fiend, Mr. Farmer!" said Amy passionately.

He bowed with his *vieille cour* air, that always seemed the prelude to a minuet.

"You wrong me," he said; "but time and events will justify me. Let us return to our starting point: your daughter's marriage with my cousin's son. Let me see her. I do not mean now only, but frequently, so as to become acquainted with her disposition, able to judge of her on high ethical grounds and not only on this wretched lowland of expediency. If I find her all that her appearance and manner promise for her, who knows?—a way of escape, and let me see, yes, perhaps of substitution, may be opened for her, that would make all things square again. Poor child! I am truly grieved to be the means of wounding her, but——" He shook his head with a curious mixture of compassion and severity. He was deeply moved for the young people and full of pity for Edith, but the life and repute of his cousin's son were at stake, and "blood is thicker than water," said Mr. Alick Farmer

musingly. "But we will not be precipitate," he added, still holding by the new idea which had been forming in his mind since yesterday. "We will not disturb their happiness unnecessarily. Poor young people! they are like those creatures I have read of somewhere, playing with their hands over the cockatrice's den. But let me see her."

"Why do you want to see her?" asked Charley.

Mr. Alick Farmer raised his eyebrows, dropped his eyes, shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. Amy did not speak. Her olive skin turned of a livid pallor and the drops stood on her forehead; but she looked at her husband and wiped them away.

"Yes," she said, in a low dry voice; "let Mr. Farmer see Edith, Charley. He may, as he says, find a way of escape for her; remember," she added hastily, speaking to Alick but not looking at him, "neither she nor Harold knows anything of the father's history nor their own real name. They have been Laufears from the beginning, and they suspect nothing wrong."

"All right!" said Alick jauntily. "Thanks for the caution; but it was unnecessary. What did I say just now about useless betrayals?"

"What you did not apply to cruelty and treachery," answered Amy.

"Fie! fie!" remonstrated Mr. Farmer, good humouredly. "What a little *effarouchée* it is!"

Much in her mother's life and ways had often astonished Edith before now, but she had never been so amazed as she was to-day when summoned from her brother's room to make company with Mr. Alick Farmer. She had learned nothing from her father's fainting-fit last night; indeed, the whole of the family life was so strange, there was always something odd and uncomfortable going on. But though Charley's fainting-fit had not astonished, however much it had pained her, this summons to attend Mr. Farmer did.

The well-preserved *ci-devant* young man was equal to the occasion. If he had a power, he was accustomed to say, it was that of reading his company and consequent ability to adapt himself to circumstances. He was a man of the world, and knew just how far to go—the great gift which a man of the world possesses. He had been immensely struck with Edith yesterday, and the delight in her beauty and bearing increased to-day. He thought more than once what a nice wife she would make:—but not for Fred. True, she loved the boy, and the boy loved her; but love is not eternal and constancy does better in a poem than in real life. Then again, young Fred was young and handsome; but so was he. Alick Farmer—handsome in his own way and, if not young according to the rawness of Fred's youth, was yet better than young in the mature ripeness of his forty-five years' experience; and a well-preserved forty-five,

without a waist and with dental gaps judiciously filled in, is a fascinating kind of thing to thoughtful girls intolerant of the heady vanity of youth. He need scarcely be afraid of an unformed lad like Fred, thought Mr. Alick Farmer, as he pulled down his waistcoat and settled his necktie with an air—a young middle-aged man, still sound in the chest and clean of limb, could afford to be generous without fear of the result.

So he sat down in the parlour by Edith, and talked to her of all things that he thought would interest her, from his most laughable adventures on the Continent to the character and prospects of young Fred. And if Edith did not care much for anecdotes of "Greeks" in Paris, or for sketches of *la crême de la crême* in Vienna, or for portraits of the down-trodden, much-beaten moujiks in Russia, she did care to talk of that stalwart young Adonis of hers to whom everything else in the whole range of human life was as water is to wine, as ashes are to fire. Mr. Alick Farmer could not have taken a better course towards ingratiating himself with the girl. The wily old fox! he knew all the stratagems and tactics of the art as well as he knew his alphabet; and Edith was by no means a difficult study, if she was of stubborn material in one direction when studied.

The interview, which was a long one, ended in a strange confusion of feeling with Edith if in no confusion at all with Mr. Alick; her first impressions of

doubt and dislike still remaining, but a certain personal kindness supervening, consequent on his enthusiastic praises of Fred and his fatherly interest in their attachment. She was inclined to take herself to task when she saw how good and kind he was, and to think that she had judged him harshly. But still remained the original impulse of doubt and dislike; and no self-reproaches ever clear the mind of first impressions.

Meanwhile Mr. James Bent pondered and reflected, perhaps more embarrassed as to what was the right thing to do than he had ever been before. He did not like to speak to the Shenstones; it seemed cruel, somehow, though certainly what ought to be considering his connexion with them of so many years' friendship. But he was sorry all the same. Edith was such a sweet young woman! he thought, with a tenderness more really paternal than the flashy make-believe of Mr. Alick Farmer. He had seen a great deal of her during Harold's illness, and he had taken quite a love for her—quite a strong unfeigned attachment—and for him to be the one to give the death-blow to her hope and love!

It was a grave moment for the dry, leathery-cheeked doctor; and he pondered and reflected as anxiously as if his own life, and not only the happiness of a forger's daughter, hung in the balance.

He was going up to the Hall—he scarcely knew to

what end; he was minded to let things drift and shape themselves—when he met with Mr. Alick Farmer on the road.

"Here is a godsend!" thought Mr. James Bent, who, though he did not much affect theological doctrines of any kind, had an odd kind of superstition in favour of providential chances, as he used to call them. "The very man I wanted! He will advise me better than any one else what to do; and I will abide by his advice. Halloa, Farmer!" he called out in his unceremonious way; "and where do you come from, hey?"

"Well, just at this moment from the Venus of Broadend, Miss Edith Lanfear!" laughed Alick with a knowing look, kissing his fingers bunched up into so many points of admiration.

"By Jove!" said Mr. Bent.

"You look surprised?" said Alick, with his head on one side.

"No; very natural—nothing odd about it; but I was thinking," the doctor answered.

"Well?"

"I was thinking," he repeated.

"Of the Venus?"

"Yes."

"Nothing very odd in that, either," said Mr. Alick.

"She and young Fred—eh?" jerked out James Bent.

Alick Farmer made a curious whistling noise with

his lips. It might mean assent, surprise or deprecation, as the hearer chose to take it.

"Not a very suitable match?" said Mr. Bent, with his shaggy eyebrows up to the roots of his hair.

"Scarcely. Something odd about the father?" emphasized Alick.

"Come, Farmer, be straightforward!" then said Mr. Bent impatiently. "What do you know about this Lanfear?"

"What do you?" returned Alick.

"I was once assistant to old Dr. Morley—the Millbank doctor."

"I see; and you recognize Lanfear as one of your charges?"

"Yes; on my soul I do."

"Well, I know all about that. You remember my friendly suit with my family?—my father's will—forgery—cut me out of the property entirely. Young clerk in the office did it; supposed deep passion for my sister Laura—no other reason assignable—will upset—I came in as heir—the clerk Charley Lanfear, who got his twenty-five years' transportation for the job. Now you know where you are! But not a word of this to any one! I will prevent young Fred's marriage with the girl quietly—without scandal. She is a nice girl enough—a very nice girl; and but for her birth would do honour to any man's establishment; but so things are, poor little soul!"

Mr. Alick Farmer shook his head slowly as one in great mental trouble because of the irreconcilableness of Christian charity with social exigencies; grieving that fate, not he, weighed down poor Edith's chances, and that Mrs. Grundy as Rhadamanthus would be so much more potent than Love as Leveller.

"She is a first-rate girl," said Mr. Bent warmly. "The way she nursed that poor brother of hers was grand. But with such a father she is not the right sort for Fred Shenstone. However," here he sucked in his cheeks and lowered his eyebrows, "my hands are clear now. You know the whole story and you are the boy's relation; so I am quit of the matter. So much less to think of and worry about! Good day. Going to the meet to-morrow? They say that Dewdrop, Ned Parker's mare, sprained her back yesterday and won't be good for work under two months or more. Best mare in the field!—but wait till my filly comes out; she'll teach you all some of these days!"

And then, touching his horse with his heel, the Roadend doctor cantered off, and left Mr. Alick Farmer to his secret, his meditations and his designs.

He was not minded to take action just yet; rather to let things drift quietly while he watched chances and opportunities. He had not quite made up his own mind as to what he wished; he knew, in a hazy kind of way, that Edith was very charming—very charming indeed,

he used to say at the Shenstone's breakfast table, emphatically—and he knew, in a rather less hazy kind of way, that Fred ought not to marry her. The eldest son and heir of the Roadend Shenstones ought to take clean blood into the family. If he had not been the eldest son now, or if he had been older—say, a man of the world who knew exactly his own moral status and how much he could afford in the way of defiance to Mrs. Grundy—ah! yes! that would be quite a different thing! said Mr. Alick Farmer to himself; feeling that *his* moral status would allow of any amount of defiance and be none the weaker for the process. Meanwhile he went daily to Rosehill, either alone or with Fred; and in the neatest and pleasantest manner in the world interrupted and cut short all confidential effusions;—wherever the young lovers went, making a third so naturally, and apparently with such praiseworthy design, that neither Fred nor Edith could complain, how much soever they might lament.

Neither could Edith complain of anything covertly unpleasant in his manner to herself. That she felt he intended love-making by all he said and did was one thing, that she could put her hand upon any proof another. This kind of intangible but unmistakable love-making is an art especially cultivated by a certain style of men, of whom Mr. Alick Farmer was one, and is about the most embarrassing process to which young

women can be subjected. Edith had no help for it, and no shelter save with Fred; and soon this was taken away from her, for Fred had to go back for his final term to Cambridge, and thus she was left utterly unprotected in the hands of her mother and Mr. Alick Farmer. Poor child! she could not have been left in hands that would have been more ruthless in their gripe, or that would have cared less how deeply they bruised her in their hold.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

Things indeed looked badly enough at Rosehill for every one. Charley and Amy were, if possible, more melancholy and more uncomfortable than ever; Edith was oppressed with an indefinite sense of ill striking through the happiness of her young love; and Harold, who kept himself in that irritating kind of convalescence peculiar to sickly youths—putting off as long as possible the hour of complete recovery for the pleasure of being nursed and petted by Edith and Mabel—was now a burden and now an occupation, as the duties or the moods of the household went.

Burden or occupation as he might be to them, he was a sore trial to the temper of Mr. Bent who poured in his tonics and stimulants without effect, and who could not make allowances for the unmanliness of a youth of age fit, as he used to say, to wear Her Majesty's uniform and to be of some account in the world. And even Edith thought it a pity that he did not try and exert himself a little more; and surely he would be better if he left the easy chair and all

those hot stuffy pillows, and came down into the garden for a little fresh air and exercise! Her love had no harsher comment than this. But, strangely enough, Amy, for the first time, took part with the boy's effeminacy, and rather exaggerated than lessened his weakness; this giving her a hold on Edith which she kept without much mercy.

This was before Fred went back to college, when the mother grudged every moment to her daughter which was not passed in the sick room, and when only the presence of Mr. Farmer, as a benevolent third, made her consent to any interviews between the lovers at all. Since Fred's departure and cousin Alick's daily visits to the cottage alone, her tactics had changed; and she was always willing to take Edith's place by her brother's side, that she might have a little air and exercise, which would do her so much good, dear girl! under Mr. Farmer's pleasant guardianship. And the more the girl resisted the more the mother insisted; till the very name of Mr. Farmer became the signal for contention between them, and Edith learnt to ascribe to him some of the worst passages of her life. Which was not wise in Amy if she wished to carry her point. Perhaps she felt it to be so hopeless by any willing means, that it did not signify what others she employed! She was not the kind of woman to lay long and careful schemes, requiring years to carry

out; else she would have counselled Alick Farmer's sympathy now with the young attachment—then his sympathy redoubled when it was broken off, as it must be without effort or help of his—and then trust in time and grateful feeling and his own powers for the rest. She was too eager and too harsh by nature to make any logical plan. It was her way to carry things by authority not by influence; and she preferred a *coup de main* to the gradual generation of circumstances. So she contented herself with imposing her will, subject to a direct struggle between her daughter and herself, as perhaps the surest and safest way in the end.

And yet there was nothing in all this that Edith could as yet take hold of—nothing that she could crystallize into a definite complaint to Fred—nothing that she could designate as love-making with Alick Farmer, or as intrigue with her mother. And still it was both love-making and intrigue; and her heart recognized what her lips dared not express.

At last one day she flatly refused to go downstairs when Mr. Farmer called; and, turning against her mother, reproached her more bitterly than she had ever spoken to her before, for the part that she was acting, and the baseness which she was endeavouring to make her share.

"I do not understand you, mamma," she said, fixing

her eyes on her mother who did not look at her; "it is too dreadful to think of for a moment, and yet I cannot help thinking it."

This was not a very lucid explanation of feeling, but Amy understood it as well as if it had been a mathematical proposition duly proved.

"You are an obstinate, perverse girl," was her answer, made with a good deal of temper in default of argument.

"Because I am faithful?" asked Edith with a fine little touch of disdain in her voice.

"Because you are selfish and cold-hearted," retorted her mother.

"Is it being selfish and cold-hearted to dislike the attentions of an unpleasant man like Mr. Farmer, when engaged to another?" asked Edith hastily.

"Engaged!" sneered her mother; "folly!"

"Mamma, what do you mean?" repeated Edith. "Either you believe me capable of falseness and inconstancy, or you think that Fred is; and I do not know which is most cruel of you."

"You know quite well, Edith, that I never liked the engagement," said Amy.

"Then why did you not say so at the time, mamma, and why did you not tell me what you disliked in it?" asked Edith hastily.

"Am I to give an account of myself to you? You

forget yourself, Edith!" was her mother's answer made coldly and yet petulantly.

"No, you are not to give an account of yourself to me, mamma; but I think I ought to know the truth of things which concern myself; and so ought Fred."

"You revolt me with your eternal cry of Fred! it is unmaidenly, Edith, to think so much of any man! Such school-girl sentimentality too, when one's whole life is such a tremendous tragedy!"

Amy jerked out her angry sentences like so much red-hot shot; feeling their injustice while she spoke, but caring for nothing so much in the world as the cause of her injustice.

Unjust or not she repeated her words with emphasis; adding, by way of rider: "Since we have been at Roadend, Edith, your character has completely changed. Formerly you were mild, dutiful and unselfish; now you care for nothing but your own pleasure and for no one but these new friends of yours. Even Harold, ill and weak as he is—even him you neglect now, or did when that young man was here—forcing me to neglect either your poor papa, or to leave the dear child uncared for. I have reason, Edith, to say that you are selfish; and now you will not go down to Mr. Farmer to please me!"

"No, mamma, I ought not, even to please you," said Edith, weeping.

"Cry for your sins, Edith, not for my reproaches!" said Amy pettishly, as she left the room to tell Mr. Farmer, fuming in the garden, that Edith would not come down to him to-day—bearing, with what patience she could command, his threats and taunts and the fall of that terrible sword with which he could, when he would, cut into her very soul.

"You know the saying, Mrs. Sutton," he said at last insolently, raising his voice as if he wanted the change of name to be heard: "The bird that can sing and won't, must be made; you know that, don't you?"

"I cannot make her!" said Amy sullenly.

"Pshaw! you could if you tried. You are very foolish, lady, for if I cannot gain her she will be none the nearer young Fred. It is not a choice between two lovers, but between taking a husband who can make good settlements and leave her well provided for, and having none at all."

"You have told me this often enough," said Amy, turning away with a contemptuous expression on her face.

"It seems not," said Alick Farmer; "not until you learn your lesson a little better. I hold you responsible, remember; and the punishment will fall on you if you fail. You understand that? For if I cannot command such means as I would I must use those I have; and my first step will be to make a full and frank relation of all the past up at the Hall!"

"Full and frank?" was Amy's significant inquiry.

He laughed. "Caustic!" he said with his gallant air; "always caustic! Yes, as full and frank as—I have proofs for. The rest, unproved, may go."

"There are reasons why that question should not be pushed home, Mr. Farmer."

"Just so," he answered; "you are admirably clear to-day!"

"Mr. Farmer, you are a wretch!" cried Amy.

"So you have always thought. I must trust to time and better knowledge to disabuse you of your injurious opinion," he answered with a sigh of resignation. "So the fair Edith absolutely refuses to descend?" he said, after a pause.

"I told you she would not come down, and I cannot force her," was Amy's sullen reply.

"Of course not! There must be no force used in matters of love," said Mr. Farmer; "a little gentle coercion to a great deal of persuasive influence but no force—dear me, no! But I expect to find to-morrow, when I do myself the pleasure of coming, that you have prevailed by this persuasive influence and that she will be ready to receive me—as her friend. This is quite possible to an enlightened mother—with a will. Adieu! No compliments. We understand each other."

On which Mr. Alick Farmer, with a familiar nod and

a dark look, turned his back on Mrs. Lanfear unceremoniously, and rode off, leaving Amy in what the French call *une humeur massacrante*, to be impatient with Harold, to scold her daughter, and to insist on better breeding and more conciliatory manners towards Mr. Farmer.

To which last proposition Edith said very decidedly: "Mamma, I will not encourage Mr. Farmer to come here and pay me attention. You know I would do anything in the world you told me to do, but I will not do such a thing as this, even for you."

"You cannot make her if she does not like it, Amy," said Charley piteously.

"Not if I tell you that your love for your father, and your duty to him, demands it?" Amy said in a harsh, stern manner.

"Demands what, mamma?" was her reply.

She spoke so quietly that her mother was thrown off her guard.

"Your kindly reception of Mr. Farmer," she answered.

"I am kind to him; quite as kind as any girl should be to a gentleman she does not know well and does not like," repeated Edith steadily. "Do you mean more than this? do you mean me to"—here her voice a little failed her—"to let him think that I like him better than I do?"

"Yes," said Amy.

"Why?"

"I cannot explain everything to you at this time, Edith, but it is for your father's life and happiness. We must keep Mr. Farmer friendly with us, at any cost—at any cost," she repeated even more emphatically.

"Papa! is this true?" asked Edith, turning to her father eagerly, not thinking of the affront to her mother implied by her doubt. "Has this man any power over you? are you afraid of him?"

"Yes," said Charley simply; "he could ruin me—he could ruin us all."

"And will, if you provoke him, Edith," put in Amy.

The girl took no notice of her mother's remark, but still kept her eyes upon her father with love if also with terror. Though the one might be the cause of her sorrow, the other was the manifest occasion; and by want of tact, by that aggressive passionateness which irritates more than it influences, had put herself in the position of an active enemy bent on ruining quite as much as on saving.

"What do *you* wish me to do, papa?" then asked Edith with a quiet despair in her voice infinitely more pathetic than tears would have been. "You know that I will do all I can for your sake—you know that, papa!"

"My Edith! I know that you are all that is good

and true!" said Charley very tenderly. Amy shivered, and made an impatient gesture.

"Do you wish me to give up, Fred, papa? I am sure you would ask no more than this!" with a tremulous shudder.

"No! no! I wish nothing!" cried Charley. "I will not have you sacrificed for me! I am not worthy of it, my darling!"

"It is not sacrificed for you only," said Amy hastily. "Remember, Charley—if indeed you can remember anything—it is a matter in which all are ruined alike."

The harsh tones of her voice grated on Edith painfully. At that moment she hated her mother as much as a nature which had so little of angry passion in it could hate.

"I wish *you* to tell me, papa," she said emphatically; "I will accept any fate *you* desire to give me; but only what you choose to give me."

Poor Amy, she had a hard part to play! Among her many martyrdoms was that of being the resisting medium, upon whom all rained reproaches and blows. Alick Farmer blamed her for her daughter's faithfulness; Edith blamed her for the sacrifice which she demanded, apparently with such cruel selfishness and hostility, in reality with such heart-sickness and for her one undying love; and even Charley himself, while recognizing her devotion, felt fretted at her grim

tenacity. On all sides she gathered into her sore soul the stings and smarts of pain and anger; and while her life was simply one long act of sacrifice, there fell upon her punishment which would have been severe had it been a life of selfishness and sin.

Charley did not answer Edith directly. He looked timidly at his wife, helpless and divided. She made him a slight sign, but he still hesitated. It was so hard for him to give pain!

"You know what you ought to say," said Amy in a low voice.

"It would be better, Edith, if the marriage——" stammered Charley. Then he stopped—he could not say the words.

Edith took his hand in both of hers, and kneeling down by him looked up into his face, with a piteous look of appealing in her own that smote the weak loving man to the heart.

"I cannot!" he said turning away; "I will not, Amy!"

"Then I will, Charley," said Amy in her hard way; and yet, poor soul, her heart was sore enough! "Yes, Edith, the marriage with Mr. Shenstone must be broken off, and you must never ask why, nor try to give him a reason."

"I cannot do that, mamma," Edith answered. "I have my duty to him as well as to you, and if I do

this, I must do it in my own way. If it is for papa's good—— " The tears gushed up as she said this, but she would not let her mother see them. She dashed them away, and, leaning over her father, kissed him tenderly; then rose to leave the room, bearing her death with her.

" Have you no word for me but this, Edith?" asked her mother jealously.

" What do you want, mamma, but submission?" she answered. " If I sacrifice my life for you, all my happiness, what else do you care for?"

" Justice," said poor Amy.

Her burden lay very heavy on her at this moment; and yet she must not shift it for even a moment's ease!

" I give you justice, mamma," her daughter said; unconsciously unjust as she was at the moment of speaking; " but I cannot forgive you yet. It will come in time, because you are my mother; but I cannot feel yet that you have been like a mother to me in this, or that you have ever been my friend!"

" That is enough, Edith!" cried Amy; " now you may go, and we understand each other!"

Which was exactly what they did not do, poor women! If they had, they would have saved each other much useless pain and perplexity, and that bitter false judgment which comes from ignorance of feelings and misreading of motives.

" My poor Edith!" sighed Charley when she had left

the room; "Oh Amy! this is the worst punishment of all!"

"I know one worse!" flashed out his wife.

"Scarcely!" said Charley in his simple way. "In all our troubles, Amy, we have loved each other, and that is just what poor Edith is denied."

"It is for her good," answered Amy gloomily. "Why fight against Providence, Charley?"

"I doubt if Providence has much to do with me or mine in any way," Charlie answered with a sigh. "I should think by this time that Heaven, like everything else, must be pretty well tired of me and my affairs!"

He said this quietly and in simple good faith; then he drew his colour-box towards him and took up his patient daubing where he had left off; and was soon painting as placidly as if he had not just this moment assisted at his daughter's sacrifice, and proclaimed himself an outcast from God, and therefore a man accursed.

Such a fluid mass of affectionate weakness as he was! After all, had it been worth while to save him as he had been saved, at such desperate cost to others? Even Amy sometimes asked herself this question when contrasting her own enduring anguish with his boyish elasticity; but she had always one answer which made all the rest good—she loved him; and love neither reasons nor regrets, neither chaffers nor proportions.

It gives without scanning either worth or utility; and by some inscrutable law generally gives most to the least worthy, and sacrifices the greater to the less. As now, in this matter of Amy's choice between her husband and her daughter—whether his repose should be troubled or Edith's happiness destroyed for life.

It was a sore task for Edith to fulfil, but she had promised, and that was enough. She wrote to Fred, as well as she could, a confused and piteous account of something, she did not know what. But through it all came out the terrible facts that the engagement must be broken off; that cousin Alick Farmer had a hand in the confusion and was the cause why the engagement must be broken; that mamma was hard and unkind, and poor papa unhappy; that both were evidently afraid of cousin Alick Farmer, and wanted her to be very kind to him—which she would not be—for she hated him with all her soul, and loved Fred with her whole heart, and would always love him to the end of her life; and that she was more unhappy than he could possibly be, for he was all in all to her and he had other things to think of in life and other things to do. It was a sad, sweet, pathetic letter, far more likely to attract than to repel by its innocent expressions of love and its simple despair at loss—a letter which a man must have been a coward or a scoundrel to have accepted as final; and which, as Fred was

neither, and was besides madly in love, simply had the effect of bringing him down by the next express train in a boiling state of indignation and resolve;—meaning first to horsewhip Cousin Alick and then to rate Mrs. Lanfear, and finally to make some arrangements with his father—very vague, this part of the programme!—by which he might be enabled to marry Edith out of hand at once, and so put an end to any further bother or confusion.

This was the best method of procedure that revealed itself to his understanding. Accordingly he had not been five minutes at the Hall before he had put the first act of the drama on the stage, having had a short and violent altercation with Cousin Alick which had ended in his giving that gentleman a cut across the face with a riding whip, that somewhat spoilt his well-preserved debonair good looks, and destroyed his plans. But he made others, as effective if not so pleasant. Meanwhile took his punishment magnanimously; forgiving his impetuous young cousin with quite royal generosity, and so getting the sympathy all to his own side: even the hearty father—who hated craft and underhand work as he hated poaching and who more than suspected Master Alick's love of double dealing—even he feeling that Fred had been too precipitate; while the sweet mother was all aghast at the boy's unconquerable fury and, womanlike, took the part of the assaulted.

"Pray, do not distress yourself, my dear Mar!" said Cousin Alick good-naturedly; "we must forgive these young bloods a little excess when under a mistake. All this will be explained by-and-by, and then Fred will see the wrong that he has done me, and understand how I have acted only in his own interests. Till then I must be content to be belied!"

"I am so sorry, so very sorry!" said Mrs. Shenstone in great perplexity and distress. "Fred, my boy—dear Fred!"

"Do not speak to me, mother!" cried Fred; "do not say a word in excuse for such a scoundrel!"

"There, you hear that?" said Cousin Alick, shrugging his shoulders. "The lad is raving—it is hallucination all throughout! It would be cruel, unmanly, to take any notice of him! Take my advice, Mar; let him cool down before you attempt to talk reason to him. At present you will only waste your time and breath. Do as I do—let him cool down and take no notice of this madness. It will come right in time, believe me!"

Upon which Cousin Alick, not liking the expression in young Fred's face, prudently left the room; and in a few moments was on his way to the village to hunt up Mr. James Bent.

There was no use in going to the cottage just yet. He must give Fred time for his visit, but, after then,

he would have his say and strike his blow; "and then let them all look out!" said Mr. Farmer, grinding his teeth as his fingers wandered down the thick blue welt that had followed the track of Fred's riding whip. If he could not have things ordered to his own liking he would spoil the ordering of others; and if he could not marry Edith himself young Fred should not. He had more than one weapon at hand; and it would go hard with him if all failed.

And yet, was there not some danger to himself in his revenge? What if Charley should turn upon him and tell the whole truth? What if the purchase money once paid for the assurance of silence should now have to be renewed; or, worse still, if no renewal would be sufficient? True, Charley was a poor nerveless fool who could be always scared into submission; but Amy?—A dogged little wretch like that, who could be sure of her! Yes, it was a perilous game; but then had not he, Mr. Alick Farmer, been playing a perilous game all his life?—and was it wise to shrink now? If he could have healed all wounds and shut the door to all dangers by marrying Edith, well and good. That is the course he would have preferred; but, failing that, he would have revenge on young Fred, and insure himself against the loose babbling of intimacy by cutting asunder for ever the cord binding the two houses. Let him but bring Mr. James Bent to the front, and

the thing would be done. Neither father nor mother would consent to their eldest son's marrying the daughter of a returned convict; and after all—fighting behind Mr. James Bent, what had he to fear?

So Mr. Alick Farmer quieted his fears—he had no conscience to disturb him—and went on his way resolved to hunt his miserable accomplices clean out of a place with which he held relations, and to make them clearly understand that they were under his dominion, that he held them in his hand, and that he did not mean to let them go.

But Mr. James Bent was not at home when he called; and, though he waited till far into the evening, he waited in vain. A difficult case was on hand at the extreme edge of the Roadend doctor's professional boundary; and Mr. Alick Farmer was obliged at last to write a private note, telling him something of what had happened, and putting it to him as a friend of the family to come forward and end this disgraceful entanglement. He himself could not do it now, after young Fred's insane attack. It would be taken as personal animus and lose half its effect; for all that it was his affair—peculiarly his affair indeed; but under the circumstances the information would come better from a stranger, and one personally uninterested. So would Mr. Bent take this painful duty on himself, and rid the place of this nest of impostors forthwith?

All of which Mr. James Bent read by the light of that early morning on his return home; sucking in his cheeks and whistling as he read, with a rabbit-mouth expressive of much. He was not long in deciding on one thing; he would not go to the Hall before he had seen and spoken to Charley Lanfear himself. He was not fond of stabbing in the dark; and though a resolute man, and by no means "soft" in temper or design, he liked to let his adversaries know when he intended to strike, giving them the chance of guarding themselves if they chose.

"I will be open with him, at all events," he jerked out to himself. "The man's a scoundrel, take it which way one will; but that is no reason why he should not have fair play—at least from me! But we are coming to a pretty scuffle in the place, and Gad! some of us will have to skip!"

CHAPTER VIII.

UNMASKED.

"Must see your husband, Mrs. Lanfear, if you please," jerked out Mr. Bent the next morning as he strode into Rosehill early.

Since he had read Alick Farmer's note he had been pondering much on his position and its duties; but he had made nothing else clear to himself than what he had decided on at first—namely, that he would tell Charley Lanfear beforehand what he intended to do, and so leave him the choice of free confession for his own part, or of a retreat which would be in itself an act of penitence and renunciation. He saw no other mode of reconciling his social duty to the Shenstones with human kindness to poor Charley; and perhaps there was no other to be seen.

Amy, taken aback by his words, hesitated and stood irresolute; but he repeated his request even more peremptorily; and his manner showed that he had power on his side and meant to use it.

"My husband never transacts business; he leaves all

to me," at last said Amy in reply. "To see me is the same as seeing him, and better."

"No doubt of that, ma'am!—the whole village knows which is the better horse at Rosehill," said Mr. Bent; "but the present case is personal and not transferable; must see Mr. Lanfear face to face, if you please!"

"He is too weak and nervous for any such interview," said Amy doggedly. "I do not allow him to see anyone!"

"Deuce take it, ma'am, is he insane?" shouted the doctor angrily. "If he is, he ought to be locked up. But this is mere child's play; waste of time, and full of work too. Tell you again, ma'am—must see him, and *will!*"

"You cannot, and you must not," repeated fiery Amy bristling up, like a terrier always ready for a fight.

"We'll see then," said Mr. Bent looking down at her with a little surprise. Your great fellows are always surprised at the spirit of small women. "By fair means or foul it has to be done; choice lies with you." He went to the door as he spoke and laid his big brown sinewy hand upon the lock.

"What do you want with him?" cried Amy, seizing his arm with a convulsive grasp; the wild look on her face, partly of anger, partly of terror, betraying cause for fear.

"I don't make confidences. I want him—that's

enough for you," returned Mr. Bent somewhat too coarsely. "And if you will not call him I must. Here, Mr. Lanfear! Lanfear! come here; you are wanted at once!" he shouted in a hurried excited voice, so that all the house ran to see him in startled fear;—even Harold leaping out of bed as if he had never been ill, and Edith, thinking that for sure her mother had had a fit, or that some fearful catastrophe had taken place. Last of all came Charley, pale, scared, trembling. Whatever had happened, it could bring only dismay and sorrow to him, all of whose lines were laid down in trouble.

"Good! you are not a mummy nor a lunatic, I see, as your wife would make you out," said Mr. Bent as the pale, shrinking man appeared. "Ah! Miss Edith, and how are you, my dear?" this was said with kindness, almost with fatherly compassion and tenderness. "Well, boy!" to Harold, so I started you up too, did I?" laughing in his odd chuckling way. "Not so bad a morning's work that; nothing like air and exercise and early hours for young people! Well now, see here; here you all are, Molly the housemaid as well as the rest, and I wanted only one of you! Mr. Lanfear, if you please, a word in private with you."

Charley looked at Amy in his usual helpless way, appealing for counsel and consent.

"No signals between partners," said Mr. Bent, as if

detecting a couple of card-sharpers. "My business is with you alone, Mr. Lanfear, with or without your wife's permission; and I don't want all this telegraphing for such a small matter. Now, you others, you all go; you are not wanted; and you take up both time and room."

Saying which he took Amy by the shoulders, and, before she knew what was being done to her, quietly put her out of the room and locked the door against her.

"What do you mean? what do you want with me?" cried Charley, grasping at the back of a chair to keep himself from falling.

Had it then come at last? That thing which had haunted him so long?—the fault which had dogged and hunted him for all these years?—had it caught him up, as Alick Farmer said it would? Was his shame to be made public in the land?—and was he brought finally to bay, to suffer as he best might the punishment due to crime? He passed one hand over his scared face, as if to hide himself from his fate; it was like the moment of execution to the condemned felon—the moment of supreme fear and despair.

"I know you, Mr. Lanfear," then said Mr. Bent slowly; "you were in for forgery at Millbank more than twenty years ago. Don't speak; you can't deny it; and chatter does no good to any one. All I have to do with

you is to tell you that I know you, and that I consider it my duty to let the Shenstone family know whom they have to deal with."

"Alick Farmer has told you!" gasped Charley.

Mr. Bent smiled grimly. "No; a mistake; I never forget faces—and that did it. I remembered yours when I saw you t'other night at the gate. You are not altered and have worn uncommonly well. But you were a fool to accuse Farmer; you confessed all in that! Had no loophole though, so doesn't matter. Now you understand me, Mr. Lanfear. I go to the Hall some time to-day—late in the evening perhaps." Here he looked up from under his overhanging eyebrows and watched Charley's face keenly. Could he take a hint? he thought. "Late in the evening," he repeated; "shall tell what I know, being my duty to old friends. Leave them to do as they like then. If they think their boy should marry the daughter of a convict—nice girl, good girl as she is——" He shrugged his shoulders, not contemptuously, simply expressive of abandonment of a subject. If they did like their boy to marry the daughter of a convict, why they might, that was all! It was not his business to interfere further, and he would not.

Mr. Bent's voice was both harsh and loud. He did not remember that sound travels by open windows, and that others might be open too, and listeners in places

close at hand, hearing as clearly as if in the room with him. As indeed was the case now; for Harold sat by the window of the adjoining room, and Amy was by the hall door; and both heard every word that was spoken without the failing of a syllable. Fortunately for Edith, she was in the kitchen, superintending some household work which her mother had sent her to look after, else she would have heard like the others; and then!—thought her mother, stifling a groan.

"You will not tell Edith or Harold?" said Charley's plaintive voice, after a short pause.

"I am not King Herod," replied Mr. Bent tersely.

"It would kill my girl to know the truth!" said Charley.

"Ah," said Mr. Bent, sucking in his cheeks; "I dare say she would take it to heart enough. But these things always do come out in the end. You ought never to have let her stand in such a position as she does! The more humble you had kept her, the more likely she would have been to have escaped. Such a marriage as this—sure to break down at its weak place!"

"We have been trying to undo the engagement quietly," said Charley very humbly. "I knew that it would not do; but naturally the young people cling to it, without any valid reason given to them for breaking it; and we have no reason to give. I cannot let

my girl know the truth of me, Mr. Bent; I cannot; I would rather die first! It is a coil, a miserable coil; and I, who love that child of mine better than myself, have been the one to ruin her happiness for life!"

Here he broke down into weeping, as he was sure to do when once the fear of discovery was changed to sorrow for the consequences. It was such a plastic, easy-going nature!—there was so little stability in it anyhow—save, indeed, the stability of affection and the unselfishness of a spiritless man!—so little fight in him that he could not keep up even the appearance of defence. He was almost glad that Mr. Bent knew and that the first moment of shame and fear had been got over. It was a relief to be able to speak freely with an honest man again; and he felt disposed to treat him as a friend and to ask his advice, simply from that tie of knowledge. Long familiarity with the fact of his having committed a crime, and been punished for it, had worn off the sharp edges of his self-abasement—a different thing from his fear of discovery; and, not feeling himself degraded, he did not think that others would.

"Tell me, Mr. Bent;" he then said, "what had I better do to make the blow fall lighter to my girl?—what can I do?"

"How can I advise?" said Mr. Bent roughly. "You should have weighed the consequences when you did

such a vile thing; such a stupid thing too! Why on earth you did it no one ever could make out! Love for Farmer's sister, that's what they said—rubbish!"

"It was not that," said Charley. "I never saw the woman in my life, and I was in love with Amy at the time!"

Amy ground her small, square teeth audibly. After all her care, after the sacrifice of her life, this laying down his arms at the first blow—this girlish confidence in an enemy—this plaintive weakness before a judge as stern and strict as Mr. Bent!—was it to be wondered at if the firm, fibrous little woman gnashed her teeth in despair, and felt in one moment of time the whole accumulated weight of the terrible burden borne for all her life?—if she acknowledged the folly of attempting to be a Providence for any one?—and felt the vanity of self-sacrifice in order to bolster up weakness?

"Then, why the deuce did you do it? What gain was it to you? What probable interest could you have had in old Farmer's will?" urged Mr. Bent. "Come, make a clean breast of it, and tell me the whole truth!"

Something almost better than courage came across Charley's face, as he cleared his eyes and said firmly: "No, that is a secret; one that I have sworn to keep, and shall, to my death and through any blame or misrepresentations!"

"Bravo!" called out the doctor approvingly. "Glad you have not left all your manliness in the bush! Perhaps you'll pluck up altogether and do what's right in other things, eh?" He lowered his head again, and looked up as before from under his overhanging eyebrows. Charley stood still for a moment, then he lifted his head and flung back his soft, drooping hair from his face, and held out his hand.

"I know what you mean, Mr. Bent," he said in a low voice; "and I'll do it. No one else need tell them, I will tell them all myself. I'll go to the Hall this morning, and face my own shame."

"And redeem it," said James Bent, as he took the outstretched hand and shook it. And even he, stern and strict as he has just been called, did not feel that it was the hand of a degraded man which he touched now, almost in friendship;—of one weak and sorrowful and in the crisis of a great and heavy anguish, yes—but no more than this. And indeed this was the truth. Charley, forger as he was, had not become in soul degraded to the level of his crime. And the antiseptic quality which had saved him had been Love.

No more was said between the two men. Abruptly, as he did all things, Mr. Bent strode to the door and unlocked it noisily; and Amy had just time to dash into the miserable den they called the dining-room before Mr. Bent was in the passage.

"You promise?" were his last words said at the hall door; and Charley answered: "Yes," clearly, distinctly, and firmly.

Then Amy, looking up, saw Harold sitting by the window and read in his face that here too the labour of her life had been in vain. She was a stout-hearted little woman and in a manner inured to suffering; but when she looked into her boy's face she suddenly loosed the reins which she had held so long and kept so firm, and, flinging her arms round his neck, burst into a passion of such tears as she had never shed but once before—and that was when young Charley Sutton, the lawyer's clerk to whom she was engaged, came one day and told her that he had committed a forgery which would be discovered, which had been done for the very purpose of being discovered, all out of love for her.

"Never let any human being know what you have heard, Harold!" she whispered, choking back her sobs; "above all, not Edith, poor Edith, who has misunderstood me so bitterly!"

"No," said Harold mechanically.

"Nor poor papa? Harold, boy; you do not know all the story; you never will, nor must! But, indeed, papa is not to blame so much as he appears. You will believe that, Harold, when I swear it?—believe that he was more weak than wicked, more sinned against than sinning?"

"Yes," said Harold, as mechanically as before.

"And you will keep the secret all your life, as faithfully as I have done?"

"Yes," came the weary voice, in the same half stunned manner.

"And you will not fret, Harold? Promise me that you will not fret!"

"Why should I fret?" said the poor boy with a patient despair that touched Amy to the quick; it was so like his father's manner.

"No, there is no reason, certainly," replied his mother with a little embarrassment; "and yet it would be only too natural!"

"Not to me, now," said Harold, rousing himself to speak. "When I knew that Edith cared more for Fred Shenstone than she cared for me, I knew the worst thing that could happen to me. Even this is not so bad as that was, mother; but this is bad too, and worse for Edith than for me."

"But Edith will never know, if we are all faithful to our trust; and you must work yourself a new name, and forget the old life," said Amy, vaguely.

"Forget the old life?" he smiled a little bitterly; "yes, I shall soon forget that, never fear, mother."

"Amy! Amy!" called Charley, "where are you, Amy?"

"Remember!" said Amy softly, turning back as she

left the room to see her son droop down against the window-sill, hiding his face in his hands.

"Amy, it is all known, and I am going up to the Hall!" said Charley in a steady way enough, but a little breathlessly, a little excitedly.

"I know all you can tell me," answered Amy shortly; "you forgot the open window."

Charley shrank at her tone. He knew it too well, and had heard it too often not to understand its full meaning.

"Well?" he said, with a slight hesitancy.

"Well!" She spread out her hands with a gesture of renunciation; then added, after a pause: "my work is over! I have tried to save you, Charley, and I have failed. I have no more to say."

"But I could do nothing else," pleaded Charley. "It was the only honest thing left to me to do; the only manly thing! Tell me, dear, that you think with me; tell me, Amy."

She looked at him half sorrowfully, half reproachfully. She had been so long accustomed to think of herself as the sole arbiter of his thoughts and actions; as the pivot on which the whole of his life and safety depended; so long accustomed to pity herself for her responsibilities, that her self-love and her love for him were both wounded; and sorrow for the ordeal to be passed through, and sorrow that Harold had heard all,

—she could find no satisfactory word to help on her husband's new-born courage.

"You do not expect me to go with you, I hope?" she said, more peevishly than she had ever spoken to him for all the years of their marriage.

"No, I would rather go by myself, I think," Charley answered patiently. "I should be less embarrassed by myself; and, as it has to be done, I had better do it the best way I can."

"I am glad you do not want me to go with you," repeated Amy. "Odd as it seems to me to be flung overboard in this sudden manner, after all these years of care of you, it is better than if you had relied on my help in this!"

"I don't fling you over, dear," said Charley very tenderly; "but things have come to a crisis now, and I am forced to do as I am doing."

"Oh, of course, of course!" said Amy discontentedly.

"Poor Edith! I am afraid she will feel this very much!" sighed Charley.

"What! are you going to crown your morning's work by taking her too into your confidence?" cried Amy.

"No, I did not mean that; but the breaking off the marriage. They will never let it go on now, Amy!"

"She will have to learn to bear her troubles patiently, as her mother before her," was the grim reply.

And Charley said no more. He had never had an hour's dispute with Amy since he had married, and he would not begin one now. But he had never been so near to one as he was now.

It was an awful moment for the poor fellow when he reached the Hall and stood face to face with his doom: and yet there was a certain feeling of relief and satisfaction in the midst of his trouble. He was slipping out of bonds that had long galled him, taking off a mask which had half stifled him since he had worn it. He felt almost as if about to enter a new life and that in falling he should rise. Never since he had done that fatal deed which had shadowed all his life had he felt such a sense of coming freedom as now:—to be bought with a price, truly; and yet what price is too heavy to pay for freedom, let the fetters bear what name they will?

It was so strange to see Mr. Lanfear at the Hall, that his coming created quite a sensation, and all the girls and younger boys—the elder boys were not at home—gathered in groups and stared, staglike, as country children do stare at any novelty. Fortunately for him, Mr. Farmer had found it convenient to go out for a day's shooting. Having set the stone rolling he had no desire to assist at the confusion of its descent. Not that he expected to see Charley himself come to the front, but even with Mr.

Bent as tale-bearer awkward questions might be asked, to which answers would be difficult. And, fortunately too, Fred was also out of the way, having gone across the fields to Rosehill, and so missing his father-in-law elect, to the mutual advantage of both. So that poor Charley had as clear a field as he could have had for the suicidal confession to be made.

"I have come on rather a painful errand, Mr. Shenstone," he began when he had seated himself in the library without witnesses. He hesitated a little as he spoke; but, on the whole, his voice was tolerably firm and distinct.

"I am sorry that any errand from you to me should be painful," said Mr. Shenstone in his round, cheery way.

"It is about your son's marriage with my daughter," said Charley.

"So I suspected," was Mr. Shenstone's answer, and he began to look grave. "I do not understand the kind of shadow that seems to have fallen on this engagement; and, for the life of me, I do not make out what it is all about; but things don't pull straight, somehow. Are you going to put them right, Mr. Lanfear? I hope so; for one does not like to see confusion in things of that kind, when one's consent has been given."

"I will put them right in a way, though it will be

but a sad kind of righting," answered Charley, looking down mournfully on the ground. "I am very sorry, Mr. Shenstone, that it should have happened so at all; and I ought, perhaps to have warned you at the first; but one does not like to cut one's own throat, unless obliged. But I have been in trouble; and my real name is not Lanfear."

"Not Lanfear! the deuce it is not!" cried Mr. Shenstone. Had Charley told him that he was a Fenian in disguise, or a French spy, or some noted murderer in hiding, he could not have been more shocked, more astonished. The idea that such a secret had been harboured in his village, even in his house, turned the honest country gentleman's blood to fire till it smote upon his cheeks and brow in a flush that had as much shame in it as there was in Charley's waxen pallor. "And if not Lanfear, sir, may I ask you what it is?" he said haughtily.

"Sutton," said Charley.

"Sutton? what do I know of that name?" half to himself. "Sutton! it seems familiar to me, somehow. By George!" cried Mr. Shenstone, starting up from his chair; "do you mean to say that you are the Sutton who forged old Miles Farmer's will in favour of Laura Mason, cutting out Alick? Are you *that* fellow?" And a vocabulary of epithets would not have expressed more contempt than did the emphasis on the last two words.

"Yes, I am he. Now you know all, and the worst," said Charley.

"The worst! I should think so!" cried Mr. Shenstone. "What more would you have us to know? Would you think murder about sufficient for a day's excitement? The worst! Forgery—a convict—a man who has worked at the galleys—and calls that the worst to know!"

Mr. Shenstone dropped these sentences one by one as he paced about the room with hurried strides. He was not an angry man in general, but he was fast working himself up into a fit of passion now; and when he was in a passion it was not child's play. Suddenly he stopped in his walk, and fronted Charley.

"And yet, knowing this of yourself," he said in a stern voice; "you dared to intrude yourself into my house—you dared to bring the stain of your presence among my children!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Shenstone," said Charley with a certain gentle dignity not unbecoming; "if you will look back you will find that I did not intrude myself. If you remember, you called on us of your own free will; and though perhaps I ought to have done it, yet it would have been hard for me to have told you then what I tell you now. I had to conceal my story from my children, too, and I could scarcely refuse them the privilege of knowing yours without giving them some good reason; and that I could not find."

"Hard! yes, and difficult too—I don't deny that," said Mr. Shenstone, just a shade less angrily, angry though he still was; "but let me tell you, Mr. Lanfear, or Sutton, or whatever your name may be, that is just what any honest man would have done. Such a thing as this, known in the beginning, would have prevented all this confusion and perplexity with the young people; and if you did not know what reason to give them to stop any intimacy between them in the beginning, you ought to have made one! What will you do now pray, when the marriage is broken off? The longer a thing is about the more difficult it is to do—that is my experience; and I have had a pretty wide one!"

"Ah, sir! it is so difficult for a man like you to understand the shifts and perplexities to which a thing like this reduces one!" said Charley with deep emotion. "After one has come home, trying for the sake of one's children to earn a new name and to redeem the past, it is so hard to know what to do for the best!—whether one ought to be quite honest, say to people like yourselves, and so cut the ground from under one's feet—or whether one may not let things take their own course, in the hope that nothing will be found out."

"And live in a fool's paradise!" said Mr. Shenstone impatiently; "besides dragging others into the mess for want of honesty and plain speaking."

"I knew nothing of what was going on till it was too late," said Charley. "You know I never saw them together; and indeed sir, I did not think of even the possibility of such a thing!—neither I nor her mother. We are not people, Mr. Shenstone, to have schemed for our daughter at the expense of an honest family. One fault, even such as mine has been, does not necessarily destroy one's whole character," he added, looking straight into Mr. Shenstone's face.

"It does it no good," said Mr. Shenstone. "A lie sticks to a man like mud; and though you may brush for ever you can never get rid of the stain. I never knew a liar yet who was worth his salt. But what, in heaven's name, made you do it?" he added in the tone of one personally injured. "Why should you put your fingers into other folks' pies? and what was it to you what will old Farmer chose to make? I remember they spoke at the trial of your being in love with Laura as the motive; but that didn't seem to fit, somehow; and, at all events, here you are, married, with children that must have been born not so very long after the event."

"It was not long, as you say," said Charley. "My wife went out to Australia about the same time that I was sent there, and got me assigned to her as a servant."

A smile came over Mr. Shenstone's face. He did not

say what he thought, that the servitude was no legal fiction and that the assignment had continued to the present day. What he did say was wide of this thought.

"Which makes the motive darker than before. Why did you do it, Mr. Lanfear?"

"No one will ever know that!" said Charley. "At whatever cost to myself, I must keep that secret!"

"Would it in any way exonerate you if known?" asked Mr. Shenstone anxiously.

There was a certain accent in Charley's voice that seemed to him almost like a lightening of the heavier part of the sin; and quite instinctively he caught at it. If it might all prove a mistake? If by some moral thaumaturgy Charley might be proved innocent, and some one else saddled with the blame!

"I must not say anything about it," Charley answered; "not even if I could clear myself by doing so."

"Not if you could secure our esteem and your daughter's happiness?" said Mr. Shenstone gravely.

"Not even then," he replied, covering his face with his hands.

"Tell me this one thing only," said Mr. Shenstone, much moved—"are you afraid to say why you did it?"

"No, I am not afraid, sir; but I have promised—and I must keep my word."

"And yet, with this fidelity and scrupulous honour,

you could commit a forgery!" cried Mr. Shenstone, half angrily, half surprisedly.

Charley was silent. What indeed, could he say? He had already confessed his guilt; and he must not add his justification. What need to multiply vague words ending in nothing? But it was a bitter moment for him and a trial of his truth.

"I think I need not take up your time any longer," he then said, rising. "I have said all I have to say—all I may say—and I must leave it to you now to act. *I* cannot break off the marriage, because I have no better reason to-day than yesterday to give my poor girl." Here his voice faltered, and his mild blue eyes filled up with tears. "But you can break it without giving her any reason, and she need never know why. She will be pained enough as it is; we need not add to it the shame of her father's disgrace!"

"Poor Edith! I am sure we all love her like a daughter," said Mr. Shenstone, tenderly. "Had it been anything less than this I would not have cared a straw! Poverty—low birth—pshaw! Fleabites! The Shenstones can afford both in their wives! But disgrace!—a convict's daughter—I cannot get over that!"

"No, I did not think you could," said Charley; "and the worst punishment of all is when our sins are visited on our children! If I could buy back my poor girl's happiness by imprisonment for life, I would!" he said

very fervently. "And if I thought that my death would do her any good, I would commit suicide to-night!"

"Don't talk rubbish!" said Mr. Shenstone hastily. But his lips very slightly quivered and his eyes were almost as tender as Charley's own as he held out his hand and shook hands with the returned convict warmly.

"He is a decent fellow spoilt," he said to himself; but somehow he thought him more decent than spoilt.

And so he told Mar, when he called her into the library to give her the startling bit of information which Charley had just communicated to him. And so he told Cousin Alick, too. And Cousin Alick, who had turned so oddly pale and had been so strangely agitated when he heard that Charley himself had been up to make his sad confession, assented with a warmth that quite startled his cousins; and, in reference to his refusing to tell the motive of his crime, added: "He is an honest fellow, after all, Shenstone, if he can keep faith like this. Who knows but, if the truth was known, he might be found comparatively guiltless!"

"How generous in you to say so!" said sweet Mrs. Shenstone. "You, of all persons, whom he tried so hard to injure!"

"Oh, I am a weak, good-natured fool, as all the world knows!" said Cousin Alick, with his good-fellow

manner. "I am not one to bear malice against any one—not even against poor Sutton—nor," he laughed, "against my fiery young cousin Fred!"

"Poor Fred! he will be sorry now that he was so fiery," said the mother. "My poor Fred! how bitterly he will feel this!"

"Ah! it will sober him for a time awfully!" said Cousin Alick; but he did not look displeased at the prospect. A little sobering would not come amiss to that fiery young blood he thought, as his fingers travelled along the scar across his face.

CHAPTER IX.

FORGIVEN.

THE story which Charley Sutton would not tell was simply this:—*he had been bribed by Alick Farmer to forge this adverse will.* The true will of old Miles had not been quite so hostile to Alick as was the forgery; but hostile enough; by far the greater part of the property having been left to the only daughter Laura, while Alick had come off with about one-tenth. This was because of a recent quarrel between father and son; and also because the old man had unconventional ideas about woman's independence and wanted to leave his daughter placed above the temptation of marrying for a settlement.

Charley, then a poor copying clerk on ninety pounds a year and desperately in love with pretty Amy Lanfear, fell an easy victim to the reasonings and sophistry of his sharper companion; and Alick proved to him quite unanswerably that the will was morally dishonest and ought therefore to be legally invalid; that it had been made in a moment of anger of which the old man himself had repented when too late;—it did not affect

his argument that this was simply untrue;—and that to reinstate him, Alick, in what was his by right, was therefore only carrying out the real wishes of the deceased, and repairing his injustice, repented of when too late! He made poor soft Charley really believe all this, quite apart from any after consideration; so that when he offered him a large sum of money if he would sacrifice just that little thing called his fair fame for him, his friend—and when he showed him that, by that sacrifice, he would secure his own happiness in love, and be able to marry Amy Lanfear, which by the present look of things seemed worse than doubtful—the temptation to buy justice for his friend and happiness for himself by the sale of his repute was too much for him. He deliberately executed the forgery, for the express purpose of being found out. For it was so patent a forgery and so unjust towards Alick, that it could not possibly stand; and thus Alick came in for most of the property by the rights of a son in taking houses and lands; and Laura, instead of thousands, had but a few hundreds as her share of the personalty. It was truly a homœopathic remedy! said Alick, as he sat carefully cutting the true will into shreds; and perhaps no one before had ever set aside an adverse will by forging one even yet more extreme.

But it all came right in the end—right, that is according to its own bad end. The will was upset;

Alick took most of the property; Charley assumed to be desperately in love with Laura Farmer as the moral motive, was supposed to have destroyed the true will—as of course there had been one, they all said; at any rate he was convicted of the forgery, and transported; after having made over to Amy Lanfear the proceeds of his shameful day's work. With which money Amy went to Australia, as was designed; bought an allotment of wild bush-land; and got Charley Sutton, the convict, assigned to her as servant; thus, for love accepting her share of the disgraceful burden which had been originally taken up for love.

A natural wish to see the old home and their children, and to put the name and association of his crime for ever behind him, brought Amy and her husband to England when his full time had expired. They knew the dangers of their return; but temptation was stronger than fear; and they came—to fall into the lion's den and to drag others with them. It would have been better for them had they remained in their wild bush farm, they often said to each other now; and oh! far better if they had made themselves dead to their children and the world. What did they want with the foolish shadow of respectability, they who could never attain the substance? Why could they not go on living outcast and isolated, as they had lived all these years? Oh! these special allurements of hope! how far and

wide they had been followed, and how fatally they had led!

Of course the Shenstones had now but one thought—the marriage must be at an end. Edith was a charming girl and they loved her dearly; and poor Charley himself had touched the stronger man's pity by the simplicity of his confesssion. Still, they could not sanction so dishonouring an alliance. They had public duties as well as private loves, and duties to their own family at large as well as to Fred, only one member of it. And then Fred was young, and would get over his disappointment in time; he was far too manly a fellow to let even such a sorrow as this overshadow his whole life! So they reasoned together, full of grief for the cruel part they must play, but seeing no other way for honset action. While still lamenting and consulting, Fred came home from Rosehill and Edith—happier than he had been yet in his affection, happy as he had always been, because understanding Edith more and loving and respecting her in proportion.

As for the mysterious barrier still threatened, he laughed at it as at a mere garden scarecrow. Barrier? when he loved her and when she loved him? Could there be a barrier in all heaven or earth where there was love?

The dinner that day was a silent one and embarrassed in its spirit to all concerned. Father and mother

were naturally full of perplexed thought; the scene yesterday between Fred and Cousin Alick had left nothing but the blankness of silence between them; and when Mr. Farmer, rising with the ladies, said he would go and hear Mabel sing that new air of hers, the young man thought he went to avoid him, and so felt himself the victor, and plumed himself accordingly. Does not pride go before a fall at most times?

When father and son were left alone there was an anxious pause for a moment; then Mr. Shenstone, who had strong ideas of doing things at once and directly, said, looking down very intently on his walnuts: "Fred, my boy, I fear I have bad news for yon; but you must bear it like a man. I am afraid this marriage of yours cannot go on. It cannot Fred; it must not!"

"Why can it not go on, sir?" said Fred, veiling the anxious tones of his voice as well as he could.

"Ask your cousin Alick," answered Mr. Shenstone.

"Ask him!" cried Fred with an angry flush; "that scoundrel! Do you think I would ask him anything about *her!*"

"No, my boy, you have misunderstood Alick! He is no scoundrel; on the contrary, he has shown himself remarkably generous and soft-hearted. He did not like to pain you, and so got into this mess. Had he been less scrupulous and more direct, a good deal of bother would have been spared I acknowledge; but one cannot blame him."

"Father! I cannot hear you defend or praise such a villain as Alick Farmer!" cried Fred passionately.

"Well, my boy, let me tell you my story, and then you may judge for yourself. You remember hearing that Alick had a lawsuit with his sister after his father's death? A forged will was found, leaving her all the property and cutting him out of everything; and this Lanfear here was the man who forged it. He is a returned convict, Fred; and this is what Alick Farmer knew, and why he wanted to save you from the marriage."

"By taking Edith himself!" said Fred. "Dear father! I do not believe a word of the story—it is one of Alick's infamies!"

"No such thing, boy! Mr. Lanfear—whose real name by the way is Sutton—has just been here with me and has told me all of his own free will."

"Told you that he committed forgery and is a returned convict!" cried Fred, deeply agitated.

"Yes," said Mr. Shenstone, looking down. He would almost as soon have put a loaded pistol to his son's head as have said this little word; and yet it *must* be said.

Fred did not speak for a moment. He covered his face with his hand, or rather shaded it, so that his father could not see the weakness he could not entirely control; but he did not sob nor start nor cry out. He was a Shenstone in courage as well as in gaiety, and

knew how to bear even a crushing blow like this with the quiet self-control of a brave man.

"But what was this to do with Edith?" he then said lifting up his head; and his father was shocked to see the pinched, haggard expression that had come like a sudden blight upon it, "granting that her father is the greatest scoundrel alive."

"No, he is not that," said Mr. Shenstone, kindly. "He seems to be more weak than wicked, and somehow gives me the impression of having been tempted rather than of having done this thing of his own free will. He is by no means such a scoundrel as his act would suppose him to be."

"But, if he was, how does that affect her?" repeated Fred.

"Would you bring the blood of a convict into the family?" said Mr. Shenstone gravely.

"I would do nothing to disgrace my family; but we men cannot disgrace it whatever the parentage of our wives, provided they themselves are good and pure! It is only the girls who disgrace themselves and us by improper marriages," Fred answered proudly.

The curly-polled foxhunter shook his head. "Cleverer than true, my boy!" he said; "an argument that may hold good in a debating-room but that won't wash in private."

"Father! father! do not say that!" cried poor Fred,

laying his hand on his father's shoulder. "It would break my heart to lose her! I cannot give her up! I cannot indeed, even if I loved her less! It would seem to me so infinitely unmanly to throw her over because her father has been a knave! And who would know? There are not half a dozen people in the whole world who know anything about it, and, as my wife, who would care to track her real parentage, through the change of name too? Dear father, I cannot give her up! Do not make it a matter of contest between us!"

The boy's face was so earnest, so manly, and so full of feeling, that Mr. Shenstone's heart grew sore and soft. It was playing an uphill game throughout; for he too loved the girl; and we know how much he loved his children and how easy going he had always been with them. And now that the first horror had passed, the old good-natured promptings had begun to stir, and the Shenstone optimism was not without its due force. And yet he must not yield! As a father, as an English country gentleman, he must be firm. Fred must not bring the blood of a convict into the family; his son's sons must not be born with the brand of the galleys upon them.

"My boy," he began, holding his son's hand in his as lovingly as a woman might have done: "you must bear what is inevitable like the brave man you are."

"Master Lanfear wishes to speak with you, sir," said

the servant flinging open the door; and Harold, pale, with large, dark, dilated eyes, crisp quivering lips and thick drops on his forehead, dashed feverishly into the room, as if moments were hours on which hung the fate of nations or the lives of all he loved.

"Harold Lanfear!" cried both the men in a breath; "why, what on earth brings you here!" supplemented Mr. Shenstone; "at this time of night and in such a state as you are!"

"I know all," said Harold, speaking fast and feverishly; "but I have found out something more than I was told; and I thought I would come up without their knowing and tell you all I knew."

"Sit down, boy! sit down, and take some wine, for heaven's sake!" said Mr. Shenstone kindly. "You are quivering like a leaf and look as white as a sheet."

"Oh! never mind me!" said Harold, putting back the wine. "I have strength enough for this; and then it does not matter! I found it all out, when papa and mamma were talking this afternoon, after papa came back from here. It was Mr. Farmer who made papa forge the will, and gave him three thousand pounds for it, that he might marry mamma out in Australia when he was sent there. This is what papa will never tell anybody; because, he says, his secrecy was bought and paid for, and it would not be honourable."

"Mr. Farmer make your father forge the will against

himself! Boy, you are dreaming!" Mr. Shenstone cried.

"No, it is all true. The other will had left him very little; and, somehow, if that will could be upset, he would get more. I don't know how it all happened," said Harold simply; "but that is the truth."

"I can understand it!" said Fred; "and I can believe it!"

"Fred! the thing is incredible!" urged his father.

"But papa and mamma would not talk falsehoods between themselves, and I would not have come up here to tell a falsehood!" said Harold.

"Truly not; but we want proofs," said Mr. Shenstone.

"Ask papa before Mr. Farmer," said Harold; "and you will find that I have told you what is right. And if you do," he continued, turning to Fred; "you can marry Edith, then, cannot you? It makes no matter to me now!" mournfully, "Mabel is going away with Craven Seymour next Christmas, and Edith loves you better than she loves me, so I do not care what becomes of me, and the sooner I am done with the better!"

"But how have you come up to-night?" asked Mr. Shenstone, not giving Fred time to speak. "The last I heard of you, you were in bed; and the night is wild and stormy for the time of year!"

"I walked and ran all the way," said Harold, who had gradually been growing paler and fainter as the feverish excitement faded and left him weaker than before. "I felt that I was the only one who could put things straight, and that I must do it if I died. It is all I could do for Edith; and she has done so much for me! Poor Edith! she will never know this!—she will never know that I killed myself for her!"

"Killed yourself! stuff and nonsense!" cried Mr. Shenstone. "We shall live to see you a hearty man yet, Harold; you lathy youths sometimes make quite respectable men!"

But as he spoke the boy turned ghastly white; with a gentle sigh he fell backwards in his chair, while a thin stream of blood flowed over his pallid lips. The excitement and exertion together had been too much for him, and a blood vessel had broken, as Mr. Bent once predicted would be the case should any such occasion arise. So his life too, fell into the Lanfear abyss, and was given For Love, like the rest.

Now what was to be done? The Shenstones were scarcely the people to turn out a poor dying boy because his father had disgraced himself; nor yet the people to shut their doors against the father, even though disgraced, when his child's life was fast ebbing away. Besides, if Harold's story was true, were not they too tainted through their kinsman?—and had

they the moral right to hold themselves apart and so much higher than the man who had suffered and been repudiated? Was it not at best but a question of degree?—and between the two was not the tempter worse than the tempted? Mr. Shenstone could not be said to reason this out consciously; but he came to the same thing in the end when he said to his wife: "We must do the best we can for him, Mar," and to Fred: "Fred, my boy, drive down to Rosehill and tell them what has happened, and bring them all if they wish to come; and send word to Bent to come up at once."

Which was practically settling the whole thing; and Fred felt very sure that everything would end well now, and that his father would never be able to hold out against the sorrow he would soon have about him. For it was easy to see that poor Harold's death-hour had struck and that he could never leave the Hall again alive. It was only a question of time and of amount of suffering; the end was certain.

It was a very sweet and lovely euthanasia for him, poor fellow!—and one that made amends for many of the mortifications and shortcomings of his life. He himself said it was like the ending of a poem; and no one grudged him the innocent glorification he took to himself from the thought that by his life he had bought the happiness of his sister, to a certain extent the rehabilitation of his father, and the deliverance

from despair of Mabel's brother. It was not such an ignoble day's work for a weak, nerveless, useless creature to record!—and so he said to Mrs. Shenstone naïvely, when she was once sitting by him for a few minutes alone.

"And you will not let it be useless, will you?" he added, clasping the firm white arm between his fevered hands. "You will let Edith marry Fred, now, will you not?—now that poor papa was not so much to blame, and that I came up here and broke a blood-vessel for her?"

"It shall not be useless, my dear!" was the answer made tenderly.

"And when I am dead Edith and Fred may marry?"

"Yes, Harold, they may," said the kindly mother, bending over him and wiping his clammy forehead.

She and her husband had been talking it over between them; and both had come to the same conclusion; that though it was a pity—a very great pity.—it could not be prevented now, and the engagement must go on, for all that Edith's father was a convicted forger.

And they kept their word. For after Harold died, they took Edith to live with them until such time as it was wise for Fred to marry; and Amy and Charley wandered away into obscurity as the kindest thing they could do for their daughter and the best for themselves.

It was a sore pain to Charley to leave Edith; but he had no alternative. The Shenstones wished it; Amy demanded it, and he could no more make head against either influence than he could efface the stain of the past from his name. He fretted a good deal at the first; for Edith's love and tenderness had become very dear to him in these later days, and he had enjoyed the frank free life of the Hall which had a little stood between him and his wife's oppressive guardianship; and naturally he felt his old bondage heavily when he returned to it; but he gradually accustomed himself, as of old, to be Amy's patient slave and solaced himself by often writing to Edith—the letters of a fretful schoolboy.

Amy never wrote. Mother as she was, she was also a woman, and could not root out of her heart a certain grudge against her daughter for having attained her happiness through the self-sacrifice of Harold. Had Harold's happiness been bought by the sacrifice, that would have been only just and right; but it chafed her to think of herself as the martyr for love and Edith as the gainer, and she never quite forgave her. Besides, she had lived so long in the belief that women were born to be the slaves of men and the victims of the social law, that it seemed almost like apostasy when her daughter stepped out from this circle of pain into freedom and joy; and she felt for her, almost as a high

caste Hindoo mother would feel for her widowed daughter who refused to immolate herself for custom's sake. And then, beyond all this, there had been clouds of mistrust between them from the first; and Amy, though loyal and devoted, was not generous.

As for Alick Farmer, the Shenstones made no accusation against him; had no highly-wrought scenes of reproaches and virtuous indignation; never, in fact, told him what they knew (for when Charley heard what Harold had said, he simply confirmed the story, as useless now to keep secret); but quietly closed their doors against him and let him too pass out of their horizon. They had quite sufficient reason when Edith came up to the Hall, to make him understand that, all things considered—Charley's wrong-doing against him and Edith's presence in the family, "with Fred in such a temper towards him"— it would not do for him to remain. So Cousin Alick took the hint and conveyed himself away; and Alton Roadend knew him no more. It was the best way out of an unpleasantness, they thought in their honest undramatic way; and when a thing could be managed quietly, there was no use in making a fuss.

Edith never knew the name of that rock on which shipwreck of her life and happiness had been so nearly made. It was the first secret which the Shenstones had ever had among them; but they kept it gallantly;

and by degrees it burnt itself out of their minds altogether. No one knew anything about it they thought: —they were ignorant all their lives of Mr. Bent's silent cognizance:—Cousin Alick, happily for them and for himself, died of fever before the year was out; Charley and Amy were as good as dead; Edith was the sweetest and dearest girl in the world and made Fred the best wife imaginable; her children were models of health and good temper; and altogether everything was as sunny as ever, and just as it should be. So that uncomfortable little "kink" which had been knotted in the dock of the Old Bailey so many years ago was pulled as straight as if it had never been; and the good-natured easy-going family buried their skeleton and planted flowers on its grave, like wise people as they were. Surely a better thing to do with those rattling old bones than keeping them in the home cupboard for perpetual contemplation and unending dirges!

THE WHITE WITCH OF COMBE ANDREW.

THE WHITE WITCH OF COMBE ANDREW.

"I'LL just go and see my Aunt Hagley: see if I don't!"

It was Mary Bernal who spoke and it was Jane Dalby to whom she spoke: and what she said she said with an air, as if more were lying behind than the mere words would show.

Jane Dalby tossed her head. "Go, and welcome!" she answered disdainfully. "For my part," she continued; "I wouldn't own as glib as you to an aunt like that old Hagley. She's none such a dear to be so proud of!"

"All very well, Jane, for you to cast stones at aunt," said Mary with a superior manner. "Me and them as knows——" Here she stopped.

"Now then, go on, can't you?" cried Jane. "Out with it. You and them as knows what?"

"Well! we knows what we knows," said Mary after a pause. "And now you're answered, Jane."

With which she left the servants'-hall triumphantly, as one who has at least given the enemy a check, if nothing worse; going upstairs to adorn her young mistress, Belle Loder—for it was dressing time; while Jane went to do the like office for her young lady, Rose Kenealy; both maids having the same object at heart for each—the fascination of Major Julius Crewkherne, owner of Crewkherne Manor hard by, and the handsomest man in Devonshire as he was one of the best matches.

Now Crewkherne Manor and the Loder property lay handy to each other; and it had always been a favourite wish of both houses that the Crewkherne boy and the Loder girl should take a fancy to each other when they grew up, and so enclose the two estates in a ring-fence that would suit every one concerned. Each property alone was well enough, in good faith!—but, both together, they would place the possessor among the best of the county and would raise the joint families of Loder-Crewkherne to a position second to none in England. Wherefore in the great matrimonial chase instituted so soon as old Darcy Crewkherne died and his son the major came home from India to reign in his stead, Belle Loder was first favourite in public estimation; and every one said it was a thing so plainly marked out by Providence—and the local map—the major couldn't but see it, and

do as his father had wished him to do:—Namely, take Miss Belle and the Loder property, so soon as the days of mourning were at an end and it was decent to take anybody.

And perhaps things would have gone their way if the Loders could have managed to keep the major close, and not have let any one else have a chance. For he was fairly enough inclined to Miss Belle when he first returned, and showed his liking frankly. But in an evil hour for her, he accepted an invitation to stay for a few days at Martin's Tor, the Rawdons' place; and there he found Rose Kenealy, Mrs. Rawdon's orphaned, penniless niece whom they had adopted and brought up, and who was "out" for her first year.

To be sure the Rawdons, mindful of the common talk, had been careful to ask Belle Loder at the same time as the major; while, to do them justice, no thought of little Rose or her possible attractions had entered into their calculations. She was but a child yet to them; and they did not think of her marrying any more than if she had been but ten years old instead of eighteen. They had known well and liked heartily old Darcy Crewkherne, and they had liked Julius too, when a boy; and they wished to be neighbourly and to carry on traditions;—that was all. And as Julius was anxious to make new and re-establish old relations, he had gone to Martin's Tor willingly; and

when he had seen little Rose he had remained more willingly. It was a case of love at first sight; and the major was a man of a clear mind and determined will. But neither Rose herself nor the Rawdons saw what was patent enough to every one else; and to none more than to Belle herself.

There could not be a more striking contrast between two girls than there was between Belle Loder and Rose Kenealy; and the contrast was not only on the outside. Belle was a tall, largely made, sleepy-looking girl with a dead white skin, a profusion of straight and silky flaxen hair, and heavy-lidded eyes of light hazel, with singularly large pupils. But you did not often see her eyes, for she had a trick of keeping them half-closed; and only when she wished to produce an effect, did she open them fully—when the effect produced was generally striking enough. Rose, on the contrary, was a small, slight, vivacious little girl, with a curly head of brightest brown, rose-red cheeks, and large dark eyes that changed with the light, being sometimes blue and sometimes grey, tender or merry as the humour took her, but always bright and frank. They were true Irish eyes, inherited from her father; and were as eloquent as other people's words. And the first sight of them bewitched Julius Crewkherne.

That was the very phrase they had used in the kitchen, when discussing the bearing of the major

towards the two young ladies. Miss Belle, she was the one as ought to be, but Miss Rose, she had bewitched him. And the word was not used without meaning; for the Devonshire folk believe in witches to this day; witches both white and black; witches who cast a spell and witches who take it off again; witches who do harm and they who do good. Wherein was the sting of Mary Bernal's words; which Jane Dalby had understood well enough; for Aunt Hagley down at Combe Andrew was a white witch of power, and renowned as such through all the country side.

Long before the dinner-bell rang and the rest of the guests had assembled, Major Julius Crewkherne lounged into the drawing-room; and almost immediately after came Rose Kenealy. She was one of the girls who give but little time to their toilet, and less thought to the effect they may produce; in consequence of which she was always first, and had sometimes found herself *de trop*. Belle, who studied every knot and circumstance of her attire and who believed in effect, never came in until the last; by which she lost chances if she gained in momentary attention.

As Rose came in, fresh and simple as usual, her dark-brown curly hair caught back by a broad blue ribbon and her white dress looped here and there with blue;—her small waist trimly belted yet leaving her free and elastic—the major thought her just the loveliest little

rosebud of a girl possible to be seen; and with a nature as sweet and pure as her face. That frank look of hers, neither bashful nor yet bold, just natural and unembarrassed, with something of the child's unconsciousness of self hanging about the woman's tenderer air, was enough for him. There needed no truer index to a fairer poem; and he accepted what he saw, and did not care to look further. Rose blushed to the very roots of her hair when she saw who was standing there in the bay window alone; but she looked only prettier for blushing; and, as she did not attempt to run away, the major liked her all the better for her girlish embarrassment.

He came out from the bay of the window and met her midway. Of late it had become a rare chance to see her alone; and he had made up his mind to profit by the first that offered.

"What pretty flowers!" he said, pointing to the flowers in her waistband. They were only a few sprays of jessamine, but he spoke as if they were something quite rare.

"I am so fond of jessamine," said Rose simply.

"So am I," returned the major. "Will you give me one for my coat?"

"If you like," said Rose, who saw nothing in the major's request beyond the mere desire to have a flower in his button-hole.

"And fasten it in for me?"

This was coming to rather closer quarters; and Rose was not used to gentlemen's coats. Hesitating then a little and blushing a good deal, only complying because to refuse would be even more awkward, the girl, hanging down her head and trembling all over, came quite close to the major; he cruelly standing a few inches further off, that he might have the pleasure of watching that bashful, shamefaced approach. Taking a spray from her waist, she tried to fasten it into his coat. But her fingers were marvellously slow and heavy, and she bungled over her simple task in an unaccountable way. She felt as if she were going to faint, to die, to laugh aloud or burst into tears—she did not indeed know how or what she felt; and it did not help her when the major, suddenly taking that little quivering hand in his, kissed it tenderly, saying in a soft whisper as he held it up to his cheek:

"May I ask your uncle to give me this, Rose? Will you give it me yourself?"

The girl made no answer. She only drooped her pretty head still lower, while her blushes faded into absolute paleness and her slight figure trembled more.

"Do you love me, Rose?" the major went on to say. "Do you love me well enough to like to stay with me for ever, and marry me, and be my little wife? Will you not speak to me, my darling?"

"Yes, I do love you," said Rose, in a low voice.

And then the major took her in his arms, and lifted her fairly off her feet, as he kissed her silently, his heart, as hers, too full for words. And when he set her down again she fled, frightened, happy, confused, in such trouble of joy as to be almost pain, till she found herself in faithful Jane's sympathetic arms.

This day Rose Kenealy was last for dinner, and no one knew what ailed her that she looked so shy and yet so happy; or what had come into her face to render her so infinitely beautiful. Only the major knew; and only Miss Loder guessed.

So now the thing was done; and Major Julius Crewkherne, the great match of the country, had committed himself to Miss Rose Kenealy;—a girl without a penny, an orphan of no local standing, just a pretty little maid with Irish eyes, rose-red cheeks, a frank smile and a true heart;—while his naturally appointed bride, Miss Belle, who had everything in her favour, was shunted to the side, passed over, and as we might say, next thing to jilted.

"And all for what?—for beauty no more than skin deep, and not so beautiful after all, even at that! and an artfulness that was cunning enough to look like innocence."

So said Mary Bernal to the cook at Martin's Tor; and cook argued with her, and thought it "a burning shame,

unless it was a crying sin." They were both Devonshire women; good, honest, faithful and superstitious. And as cook was own sister to the Loder butler, and had been born and bred on the Loder estate, it was only natural that they should take Miss Belle's matter to heart, and think it a shame in the major if—mindful of the faith they had sucked in with their mother's milk—it was not a sin in the girl; their choice lying between caprice on his part, or casting spells and dealing with the devil on hers. And again, as Rose was an orphan, and of "alien" parentage, the servants held her of no great account personally; for being only Mrs. Rawdon's niece, it was by no means certain that the master would remember her in his will, so that she was not even a future potentiality; and surely nothing of note in the present! From all which causes it is easy to understand how the feeling downstairs went with the young lady of the county and against the poor little orphan. Only Jane Dalby held by her. But then Jane had served her ever since she was six years old; and use is second nature all the world over.

When Belle Loder heard the news not the keenest observer could have said that she suffered, or indeed could have told what she felt at all. It was Mrs. Rawdon herself who told her, quite apologetically, and with many-repeated assurances that she had been as much taken by surprise as any one could be. She had

never thought of such a thing!—Rose, of all persons in the world—little more than a mere child yet and only just out of the nursery!

On which Miss Loder who until now had been sitting as if carved in alabaster, counting her fan-sticks, suddenly lifted up her eyes and looked Mrs. Rawdon full in the face. And her look was so sudden, so fierce, so direct, her eyes were so large, the pupils so dilated, the look so fixed, that poor Mrs. Rawdon turned quite pale as if she were going to faint. Then Belle dropped her broad white lids again, took once more to counting her fan-sticks, and drawled out, in a low and level voice:

"Yes, just so; but, you see, at eighteen it is rather late to consider a girl as a child; and Major Crewkherne is a good match where there is no fortune."

Which last observation affronted Mrs. Rawdon and destroyed all her sympathy for Miss Loder's disappointment.

If riches give social influence, knowledge gives moral power; and not Mr. Darcy Crewkherne himself, when he was alive—and he had been the king of these parts, so to speak—had the hold on the people that Dame Hagley had, Mary Bernal's aunt. To the outer eye she was just a tall, dark-browed, powerful and still handsome woman of about sixty, living in a solitary mud hovel set in the heart of a wild and desolate

combe or valley, where nothing grew on the hill-sides save gorse and bracken and heather; and where even sheep could find no pasturage. But to the eye of faith she was greater than the greatest, holding the power of the viewless ones of the air in her hand, and with this power the keys of life and death. Yet if spirits thronged to do her bidding, they were spirits of less malevolence, if of greater power, than those which obey the black witch. It was the black witch who banned, and Dame Hagley who removed the ban at the grievous cost and suffering of the former. And it was well known that not the wickedest old witch of them all but trembled before her; and had cause to repent her evil deeds if Dame Hagley took her in hand.

"That cursed little piece has bewitched the major, and my aunt shall know the rights of it," said Mary Bernal to herself, when she heard the news in the town; it was Miss Belle herself who told her. "I'll go over to Combe Andrew to-morrow."

It was a hot and fiery sunset when Mary, getting leave for the evening, set out to her aunt's. It was a brave thing for her to do; for the way was lonely, and not only had the valley a bad name, but many a place also by which she had to pass. Years ago there had been a murder on the cliffs, and the body had been buried in the very hovel where Dame Hagley lived;

then a child had been found cast like a dead sheep in a deserted quarry; and a man had committed suicide at the entrance of the combe. So that, on the whole, it was an awful district all round and one cause of Dame Hagley's influence was that she dared to live where others dared hardly pass. But her very living there had added to the general terrors of the place.

People wondered when they saw Mary setting her face towards the cliff path; but Mary shared some of her aunt's courage. She "favoured" her in appearance, and it was not thought unlikely by more than one that she might follow in her steps and take up the trade when the other let it fall. She always said she would never marry; and no one had yet heard of any man who had wanted to marry her. Still, for all that, it was a bold thing for a woman of thirty to go along that lonely cliff in the evening, with the sun setting so fiery red, and the black loneliness, the haunted depths of Combe Andrew to follow. But Mary had become interested in this matter of the major and Miss Belle, and it was not a little that would have turned her back from setting things as she thought to rights.

Over the cliff, and along the steep hill-path, down among the broken rocks and treacherous shingle, the girl took her way; startling the choughs and the night-jars from their resting places, while bats darted

about her head and shard beetles droned noisily as they struck her on their flight. About an hour's hard walking brought her to the point where, deep in the darkness below, she saw a faint glimmer which told her that her aunt was at home. It was almost dark by now; but Mary knew the way, and skirted its dangers dexterously. She was quite free and undaunted and did not even start when once a straying sheep came full butt against her, and once she nearly fell over the dead carcass of another. Presently she came down the hill and then along the narrow winding way that led to the hovel.

Her aunt heard her step and came to the door.

"I knew you was a-coming," she said quickly; "and I've made your tea."

"That's good," said Mary. "It's a rough road."

The two women were strangely undemonstrative in manner to each other. There were no feminine effusions, no endearments, such as most women of all classes indulge in; but they met and looked and spoke together like two men. And indeed handsome and bold and strong as they were, they were as much like beardless men as they were like each other. The same low, broad brow, the same firm eyebrows, the same dark and steady eyes, the same fleshy lips so cruel in repose, so sweet when smiling, and the same commanding height. They were as much alike as though

they were mother and daughter; and they were as formidable one as the other.

"So you knew I was a-coming?" said Mary, after a long silence, during which she had drunk her tea and eaten her cake with relish.

"Yes; they told me."

"Maybe they told you why, then?" said Mary, looking into her aunt's face with simple faith.

The elder woman nodded. "Yes; they told me that too," she answered, watching her niece.

"And can you do it, aunt? Can you take off the spell?" said Mary, earnestly.

"I never knew of one I couldn't," said Dame Hagley.

"And it is a spell, aunt, ain't it now? She has bewitched him?"

"No fear," answered her aunt.

"What else can it be?" cried Mary.

"What else, indeed!" echoed her aunt.

"There's Miss Belle, made for him as one may say; brought up together a'most and with a fine fortune when her father goes. And her father and his too, that wished it so! And here comes this sly piece, this Rose Kenealy, a mere beggar to Miss Belle, and not half so pretty. And there's the major clean mad about her; and gone and asked her. It can't be right; it must be a spell!"

"It ain't she," said Dame Hagley taking up the clue

for which she had been waiting. "It's a spell, Mary, and the major is bewitched. Can't you bring Miss Belle here and I'll let her see the face as has done it?"

Mary shook her head. "It's too rough a road, aunt; and Miss Belle's not over fain to walk."

"You want me though to work it?" said Aunt; Hagley, coming to business.

"Yes; give me something as'll take it off, aunt. See, I've brought you Miss Belle's hair and some of that Rose's; and there are nails of both of 'em; and the major's, too. I tell you I was clever to get all these, and it cost me a deal of trouble. But I did it. I don't like to see right wronged; and I did it."

"I'll see to it," said Aunt Hagley gravely. "I dare say you've brought enow. I'll work the spell and then I'll let you know."

On which, with a pack of greasy cards, some spirits of wine, a handful of salt, one pinch of benzoin and another of lycopodium, the White Witch went through a series of mutterings and strange gestures accompanied by loud and uncouth words—all of which Mary watched with a steady pulse but with the utmost attention; taking everything as gospel, and expecting to see in bodily shape one of those great spirits who were, she believed, about her aunt at this moment, doing her service and imparting to her knowledge.

After awhile Aunt Hagley lifted up her head from

the saucepan into which she had been peering alternately with the various shufflings and settings of the cards. Sighed deeply, wiping her face wearily as she sank back in her high chair, as if profoundly exhausted.

"It has been a sore time, Mary," she said; "but I've got the word and the sign at last. Rose Kenealy: there it was written fair enough; she it is as has laid the spell on the major, and you, my girl, can take it off. What would Miss Belle give you, Mary, if you could get her the major?" she asked, suddenly.

"Give! she'd give her ears!" said Mary.

"I don't see as how you could do much with them," Aunt Hagley replied gravely. "To put 'em into a stocking would scarce grow guineas, my girl! No; I mean what would she give in money? hard money—money down, Mary, that you could feel and bite on to see if it was true; that you could spin like little wheels about the floor, all of gold? How much of them, Mary?"

"Lord, aunt, I don't know," said Mary shocked. It was one thing to do good to one's own for loyalty and love, and another to work evil for money. But Aunt Hagley had long ago reduced all life to the filling of her stocking; and the only thing that she despised in her niece was the indifference which she showed, as yet, to money. But she would improve, she used to say to herself; she had good blood—and she would improve.

"It can't be done for nothing, Mary," she said gravely. "If Miss Belle will make it worth my while and yours—and yours too, my girl; I'm not selfish, and I will work for you as well as myself—but if she'll do well by us I'll do well by her; and Miss Rose shall trouble her no more. I'll take the spell off, no fear; but it's worth money, Mary; why, it's worth hundreds of pounds to her, and you'll be a fool not to make a good bargain for yourself now you've got the power!"

"I can't ask for money, aunt, for what I do for right's sake," said Mary sullenly.

Her aunt had been all this time putting some powder into a packet.

"All right, my girl; then you'll not have the spell, and Miss Rose will have the major." She put back on the shelf the small locked box from which she had taken the powder.

As usual, that stronger will had its way and the weaker yielded. After a little faint resistance, it ended by Mary putting on her bonnet again, after carefully placing in her purse a small packet of white powder which Miss Belle was to put into Miss Rose's coffee—nothing but coffee would do, said Aunt Hagley—when Miss Rose would suffer as she ought; perhaps fly up the chimney as a bat, or they would see the devil run out of her mouth as an eft or a toad, or something such like would happen to her, and the major would be restored

to his senses. And then, being in a good humour—for Mary had promised to ask for handsome gains, and to give her half—Aunt Hagley, without putting on her bonnet, took the road with her niece, laughing a little grimly as she said: "You see, my dear, *I* ain't no reason to be afraid. I shan't meet much that's uglier than myself."

Would Miss Belle do it? That was now Mary's difficulty. "You see, gentlefolks are not like us," she argued to herself. "They won't believe and they say they know; but it's we as knows, not they. Would Miss Belle believe if I stood her out till Doomsday, and told her what my aunt had said? Not a bit of it. But how could my aunt have known that I was coming, or about the major and that Rose, unless they had told her? And as for this spell that was to break that, would Miss Belle do it, however much she was told? However, it had to be tried. There was too much at stake for her not to venture."

Mary approached the subject cautiously. Miss Belle was not one who ever made free with servants; and even Mary, who had been with her for years now, had to be careful how she took her. She was prepared to be laughed at, of course; and Belle did laugh at her, and she let her. She wouldn't join in the laughter—for They were about her, and They knew that she knew Them; but Miss Belle was different. And after she

had let her laugh she brought her round, bit by bit, to consent to work her charm.

"You see, miss, if there's nothing in it, it can't do no harm; but if there is, as aunt says—Lord, miss! wouldn't it be fun to see a toad run out of Miss Rose's mouth, or a hump grow on her back before your eyes like the one the pixies put on Johnny Slade's, and she stand there, just a witch, and all the world to see it? If the major is bewitched, why, miss, as an old friend and neighbour you ought to help him to his senses again! It isn't likely that aunt and so many of us think things as isn't. We know it can be done; and we know it can be taken off again. And there's no one like Aunt Hagley for taking off."

All this Mary said in a headlong, dashing, earnest way, while dressing Miss Loder's hair for dinner the day after her evening expedition to Combe Andrew.

"Very well, you silly girl, I will to satisfy you and show you how absurd you are in your superstitions. I will give Miss Kenealy the charm, as you call it, and you will see that nothing will come of it. There, give it to me. What is it?"

"This in coffee, miss," half whispered Mary. "Only in coffee, miss; else the charm won't work!"

Belle was sitting before the glass, and the eyes of mistress and maid met in the mirror. The one was flushed, eager, coarse in her zeal, but honest and single-

hearted; the other pale, languid, reticent, seeing further and thinking deeper and accepting the responsibility of a possible evil as far as the poles removed from the intentions of the simpler sinner. The one meant an honest counter-charm—witchcraft foiled with its own weapons; the other meant—what? She took the packet and laughed.

"The idea of witchcraft in these days—how absurd!" she said.

"Try it, miss, and then maybe you'll not say that!" said Mary earnestly. And in her endeavour to persuade her to the trial she forgot all about the bargain that she was to have made, and the sum that she was to have demanded.

Dinner was over, and the coffee was brought. All during the meal Belle Loder had been supremely sweet and friendly with both the major and little Rose. The major, whose conscience had its sore points, was quite grateful to her for her niceness; and as his manners to women were of that soft sweet kind which deceive so much, whether intentionally or not—so soft that he almost seemed to be making love if he gave an old woman a penny—Belle thought in her own mind, and wondered if—Rose being out of the way;—well, if——

Coffee was handed round.

"Shall I make yours, dear?" said Belle graciously to Rose; and as she ladled out the crushed candy some-

thing more than crushed candy fell from her dainty fingers.

"Oh, thank you!" said little Rose in her turn pleased and grateful at this thawing of the Loder ice.

She took the cup and laughed pleasantly; and Belle looked at her sleepily through her half-closed lids. Out in the garden, peering from under the blind, another pair of eyes watched her curiously. They were those of the White Witch come to witness the result of her charm; and to claim its price. Not a leaf stirred; not a creature cried; Rose raised the cup to her lips.

"Rosy, give me a footstool, my dear," said Mrs. Rawdon lazily.

And Rose, ever prompt, set down her cup untasted and took her aunt the hassock. Then she sat down on the sofa, and, nestling close to her, talked in a low voice, forgetting her coffee.

"The fool, why don't she take it!" muttered the woman watching her. "Who ever saw the like of such foolishness—to have it and not to take it!"

The major was at the piano, turning over some songs.

"Belle, do you sing this?" he asked. And Belle, putting down her cup too untasted, as Rose had done, went over to him and discussed the music. Then they both came back to the table.

"Why, your coffee must be cold," said the major; and he looked into Belle's face, smiling that ineffable smile of his that had more witchcraft in it than all the spells Dame Hagley knew. Belle looked back at him with her large eyes fully opened; and by that look lost the thread. He had the cups in his hands, unsuspicious, unconscious; and he gave one to each girl. At that moment the dog made a bound through the window, growling savagely, and the woman who had kept the thread slunk away among the bushes.

The next morning a great terror fell on the house: Miss Belle Loder was found stiff and stark in her room. She went to bed with the rest, apparently in good health, but she must have died about midnight, said the medical men who made the post-mortem examination: three hours after the butler had taken away three empty coffee-cups. Yet, though she had died with all the symptoms of blood-poisoning, no trace of poison could be found by any test known to the British expert. It was a mystery, they all said; and a mystery it remained. Wherefore: "Died by the visitation of God," said the jury. "Died because you didn't work the spell as it should be worked, and get the money they had bespoke," said Dame Hagley fiercely to her niece. And: "Poisoned herself for love and disappointment," went the verdict of the world backed by the major's uneasy conscience; but no one added:

"Fallen into the pit digged for another;" while only Mary Bernal suspected, and only Dame Hagley knew.

Whatever the dame knew, it did not trouble her long; for not more than a week after Miss Loder was buried, a man going to the hovel in Combe Andrew, to inquire of Dame Hagley who had bewitched his stock? found her and her miserable home a mere heap of blackened ashes. She had been burned to death in a drunken sleep, with none to give her aid or warning—none to even know of her danger or to pity her destruction. The ruined hut was never touched. No one owned the place; and not even the poorest squatter cared to build on so unlikely and evilly-renowned a spot: so no one dug deep enough among the charred ashes to find the mass of gold which the White Witch had hidden away in her stocking, and which she kept buried under the floor of her hut. And there it is still for any brave adventurer who cares to seek it.

GALLOPING DICK.

GALLOPING DICK.

It is about two hundred years since the skeleton of Galloping Dick rattled in its rusty chains on Maltby Heath. He had kept the country-side in mortal fear for ten or a dozen years before the law laid him by the heels and justice hanged him by the neck. And ten or a dozen years of successful rapine, robbery, cruelty and murder were enough to sink his soul for ever to perdition—a perdition outside the ordinary experience of sinful souls. So at least they believed about Maltby; and the unlaid spirit of Galloping Dick became by time and tradition to be an evil power haunting the heath and boding sorrow, or worse, to whomsoever it might encounter.

It was useless to argue the matter with the people. Superstition dies hard; and as yet it had not begun even to dwindle in the minds of the Maltby peasantry. Scarcely a winter passed without some awful report of Galloping Dick's perturbed spirit having being seen or

heard thundering like the Wild Hunter's across the heath—reports which struck terror to the hearts of the boldest, and silenced, as well as humbled, those proud defying sceptics, the gentry and townsfolk, who were disposed to make light of the danger. Make light of the danger, when the most terrible fate overtook the doomed wretches who had met this awful spirit? A danger as sure as death is nothing to make light of! said the more reverent souls; and history and tradition bore them out.

Did not old George Graham's father see the ghost, and did not his eldest son take to bad courses that very next spring, enlist for a soldier, desert, run home, to be taken from his mother's fireside in handcuffs to barracks and there shot? This was in the times when George the Third was king, and men were shot without more ado if they turned their backs on their colours. Did not Ennis Blake see and hear this wild Galloping Dick some thirty years ago now, and did not his daughter Bella disappear from Maltby with the fine London gentleman who came, as it might be, from the clouds, and never a word heard of her again till the carrier brought the news that she had been hanged at Newgate for child-murder? Bella would have lived and died as an honest woman should in her own parish if it had not been for Galloping Dick. Every one said so; and the evil spirit of the highwayman got the dis-

credit of the poor girl's sinful weakness and criminal despair. And Farmer Crosse, did he not lose wife and stock one season when all his neighbours foddered the best beasts they ever fattened and gathered rich harvests till their barns overflowed like bursting bags? They had not seen Galloping Dick, but Farmer Crosse had; and who could doubt the inference?

These were the most striking instances that floated about the talk of the country-side, and kept the belief in the heath spectre alive. But there were numberless other cases where the loss of health and gear, of friend and child, could be traced directly to the hour when Galloping Dick was heard to rush past the house at dead of night, when he had been seen dimly through the mists of evening or flying like a shadow in the distant moonlight. When or in what manner soever he made his troubled existence manifest, there was sure to be the result of sorrow and loss; and the name of Galloping Dick was still able to scare all the parishioners of Maltby and to work like a crooked charm wherever it was pronounced.

Down in the hollow, at the end of Three Ash Lane, lived the Miss Sinclairs. They were two old ladies, spinsters and sisters, owning a pretty large bit of land of a less poor and hungry kind than most of the land hereaway. They managed it, of course, very badly; and got but two pounds where others would

have made four. They were miserly old ladies, and starved both themselves and their farm. They believed in teapots and stockings, odd chinks on the wall and chimney jambs, and such like hiding-places for their money—instead of investments where you never know what becomes of it or who has it—or instead of putting it into the land for the rain to spoil and the frost to nip and the tenant to filch by hook or by crook. They were generally reported millionaires at least, and supposed to have lined their little wooden house with unseen gold. The whole neighbourhood knew, as a fact, that they slept on a bed stuffed thicker with sovereigns than with goose-feathers. And when any stranger doubted the tale, and spoke of its discomfort, the Maltby folk answered significantly that maybe most men would take the discomfort for the sake of the stuffing.

They kept only one servant; and they never kept her long; for, being like birds themselves in the way of appetite, they could not be made to see the difference between a young, healthy, hardworking wench of eighteen or so and themselves, wizened, withered, old maids of sixty odd, whose vital juices were dried up so that they wanted next to no nourishment, and whose activities in the house consisted only in incessant maundering and pottering which gave them just a little gentle exercise and prevented their old joints from

becoming completely rusty. Still, though they did little that was of any use, they were always on their feet; always on the alert; with their sharp eyes looking into everything and their sharper speech that never spared a fault nor glossed over a mistake. They were bad to live with, undoubtedly; and by degrees they so entirely lost the confidence and esteem of the neighbourhood, that not a mother among them all would let her daughter take service at the Sinclairs', and the very parish at last refused them an apprentice when they wanted one—so sure were they to have an invalid turned back on their hands who would cost the rates more to restore to health than they had been saved in the time of losing it. This then was how it came about that Madge Bernard, a kind of far-away cousin in humble circumstances, came on a visit to her relatives at Three Ash Lane, on Maltby Heath; with the understanding that she was to make herself generally useful in return for the bed and board "and a trifle or so of clothes and pocket-money," which they offered her widowed mother by letter, with a few fair words put in by way of garnish and embroidery.

The first week that Madge came she cried without ceasing; the second she sulked; the third she was pert; but on the fourth she took a turn, as Miss Priscilla, the younger of the two old ladies, said with a sigh of satisfaction, and seemed as if she meant to settle and

take things as she found them. She wrote a great many letters this week; and among them three to a Mr. John Collette—three long crossed letters, as the Miss Sinclairs knew—but they knew no more. If they were sharp-eyed, Madge was sharp-witted; and if they knew how to pry, she knew better how to hide. Still three letters in one week to any Mr. John Collette in the world seemed to the spinsters a wicked waste of the time that was rightfully theirs, as well as an abominable act of forwardness. They made it their boast many a time to Madge that never a man had dared to offer *them* love when they were young;—*they* had not been like the hussies of the present day, with more hair on the outside of their heads than they had sense in, and as keen after husbands as so many wasps after honey.

Not that Madge cared for their hints or innuendoes. She had learnt by now to know her value to them; and though she could not have left them without finding some other place for herself, however much she might have wished to go she was well aware that neither would they part with her, for all their disapprobation of her goings on.

It had been autumn when Madge Bernard had brought her florid beauty and her deal boxes, with very little in them, to the mean wooden house where the two ladies lived; thinking she was going for a

pleasant visit to a couple of old dears who would make her welcome and give her lots of pretty things—finding instead that she was simply an unengaged servant without perquisites or wages. It was winter now; but Madge still stayed on and made no effort to better herself, which she might have done. Had she really reconciled herself to her sordid life and loveless home; or was she only waiting?—waiting?—for what? Who knew? Certainly not the sister spinsters with all their astuteness. If any one, only Madge herself:—and Mr. John Collette.

The winter set in wild and hard. It was the stormiest within the memory of man; and life at Three Ash Lane was gloomy and oppressive almost beyond endurance. Pinched in food and half perished with cold, Madge Bernard thought the long chill hours would never pass. Within the house cold grates and an empty cupboard, uncarpeted floors, uncurtained windows, a bed of musty "oat flight" and the sole society of two stingy, lean and crabbed old maids, made a not too joyous life for her lusty pleasure-loving youth; without, wild winds and cloudy skies, sharp storms of stinging hail, of drenching rain, of blinding snow, kept the girl from her lonely rambles about the heath, which up to now had been her stock amusement. It was a dreary time; and the only joy left her was when the Maltby carrier stopped at the end

of the lane, and, doing duty for the foot-post, came tramping through the snow up to the door of the little house, bringing her an envelope with the London post-mark on it and four or five pages inside, written close, in a neat commercial hand. What was in these letters no one had the chance of knowing. For Madge, unlike girls in general with their love-letters—and of course they were love-letters; said the sisters—invariably burnt them as soon as read, and even stamped out the blackened ashes on the hearth. It was evident however, that they made her anxious as well as gave her pleasure.

Miss Priscilla, who was a trifle the more suspicious and the keener-eyed of the two sisters, noticed all this if she could not understand it. She added another glimpse into depths she could not fathom; namely, that Madge had got into the habit of prowling about the house a great deal more than was necessary. She had even caught her ferreting in the damp hole they called the kitchen, at dead of night, when she and every honest person ought to have been fast asleep in her bed; and she was always putting her finger into holes and crevices, and poking her nose into covered jars of mouldy fat and the like, said Miss Priscilla fretfully to Miss Agatha, below her breath. And the two shook their forefingers viciously; and said if she was on that scent she should go, aye, this very week! But she did

not go. She only peeped and peered and fingered more than ever, and wrote longer letters to Mr. John Collette in London.

The evening had drawn in bleak and wild. The wind roared in the trees and whistled round the house, as if a legion of demons were calling to each other. You might fancy you heard all sorts of sounds in the blustering blasts. There were sighs and groans, mad shrieks and plaintive cries; now it seemed as if a host of winged things was flying past, now as if an army was thundering over the heath. Nature was in one of her great hours of pain and wrath; and humanity suffered with her.

"What a night!" shivered Miss Priscilla as she drew her scanty garments tighter round her, and uneasily moved the solitary candle which lighted the bare deal table on which it stood—and lighted nothing else.

"You keep such bad fires," said Madge Bernard quietly. She had been very quiet and amiable for the last day or two. "Such a handful of damp peat as that! Why, you must expect to shiver!"

"Shiver, indeed! If I and my sister, who are so much older and more delicate, can keep warm, a young thing like you ought not to complain," snapped Miss Agatha.

"I did not complain; I only observed," said Madge tossing her bright brown head. "What a night!" she

echoed, as the wind burst out into a furious blast that rocked the wooden house like a cradle; "just the night for Galloping Dick!"

"Hush, Madge!" said Miss Priscilla sternly. "I do not like such talk."

"Not like such talk, Miss Priscilla? In the name of fortune, why? You don't mean to say that you believe in Galloping Dick?" returned the girl.

"It makes no matter to you what I believe," said Miss Priscilla.

"No; no matter at all," said Miss Agatha, as chorus.

Madge looked saucy but she spoke demurely. "I think it does," she answered. "You are so much older than I am and know so much better, that what you believe ought of course to have some weight with me. And it has, I assure you. So tell me about Galloping Dick. Is he ever seen now?"

"Do be quiet, girl!" repeated Miss Priscilla, but less angrily than before. "It is a bad sign to talk of him. And such a night as it is, too!"

"But I want to know all about him," insisted Madge. "Bad sign! What nonsense! What harm can come of talking of him! Tell me about him, Miss Priscilla. Ah, now do! You talk so well. I know that he was a highwayman who was hanged at Gallows End about two hundred years ago; I don't want to hear more about that; only about him now. When was he seen last?"

"About five years ago," said Miss Priscilla, in a half-whisper.

Terrible as the subject was and much as she dreaded to talk of it, she had the true feminine love of the horrible and enjoyed frightening herself as much as most women do. Besides, Madge's insistance bore her down, and her little condiment of flattery warmed her.

"And then what happened?" asked the girl.

"The rectory caught fire and Miss Alice was burnt to death," said Priscilla.

"How dreadful!" said Madge in a low voice. "Something bad then, always happens when he is heard?"

"Always," said Priscilla solemnly.

"Have you ever heard him, Miss Priscilla?"

"I, girl?" She shuddered visibly. "Heaven forbid! If I were to hear Galloping Dick I should not expect to live till morning. My mother did, I believe, before my father died; but we never speak of that."

"It would be very frightful certainly," said Madge. "I wonder what would happen if we heard him?"

"Death," said Priscilla.

"I wish you would be quiet, you two," broke in Miss Agatha. "You have made my flesh creep. I shan't sleep to-night with all your horrors; and such a night too, as you said, Priscilla."

"Hark! what is that?" cried Madge suddenly, clutching at the table with a scared look on her face.

And, surely enough, as she spoke they heard distinctly the sound of a horse's hoofs thundering madly along the road, while a loud cry rose above the wild tumult of the night, more like the cry of a wild beast in fear, or the cry of a soul in pain, than the voice of a living man.

"God save us!" cried Miss Priscilla, rising and flinging up her hands. "What shall we do? oh, what shall we do? It is Galloping Dick, sister; our time has come!"

Sister Agatha, who was of softer stuff than Priscilla, fell forward on the table half insensible. Madge, flushed to the roots of her hair, rose too, her lips apart, her heart beating fast.

"Miss Priscilla!" she stammered out as if terror had broken her voice; "what was that? Was it really Galloping Dick?"

"Hush! not another word," said Priscilla. "We have talked too much already."

"Hark! there it is again," cried Madge. And again the horse's hoofs dashed furiously past the house, close to the very door, and again the cry seemed to penetrate into each corner and to pierce the brain of each listener. Then the sound suddenly ceased; and the wind seemed to blow more furiously than before.

In a few moments a loud knocking was heard at the door, and a man's voice saying: "Help! help! for

mercy's sake, let me in!" recalled the women from the terrors of the unseen to the actualities, perhaps the dangers, of the visible world.

"No, no!" shrieked Miss Priscilla; "we can't take you in, whoever you may be."

"Oh, Miss Priscilla, what a cruelty! In such awful weather and with that dreadful Thing that has just passed! You must let him in—a poor lost stranger; why, what harm can he do?" cried Madge.

"I will not," she said passionately. "Let him in! Why, who knows? he may have come to murder us all. He may be Galloping Dick himself!"

The knocking was repeated.

"Help!" said the voice in a tone of anguish. "If you are Christians, save me!"

"No; go away," gasped Priscilla.

"Shame! you are no woman," cried Madge as if deeply moved. "If you will not, then I will," she added; and before Miss Priscilla could stay or hinder her, she had darted to the door, and the next instant had flung it wide to the black night—and the stranger standing there.

As she opened it a man staggered in and sank down on the nearest chair. He was pale and haggard; so pale indeed, that his face looked as if it had been made of chalk. His dark long hair hung dank and dripping on to his shoulders; his heavy black mous-

tache and beard, that almost concealed his features, were also streaming with wet; and his whole appearance was that of a man fairly overcome with terror. And yet his sinister face, with its small, greenish-coloured eyes and hooked nose, was more watchful than seemed to suit with his harassed bearing; and a keen observer might have seen just one glance pass between him and Madge that did not look quite like the glance of strangers.

"Water!" he gasped. "I am dying."

"What is it?" asked Madge, who had suddenly taken the command of everything: "who has hurt you?"

"No living man," replied the stranger in a broken voice. "Something too dreadful to see and live." He shuddered as he spoke, shuddered so strongly that Madge was fain to hold the mug to his lips herself, his nerveless hands just resting on her strong white arms.

"Did you see It?" half sobbed Miss Priscilla, who was now standing by her sister.

"I saw It," repeated the stranger, and let his head fall against the shoulder of the girl.

"He is half dead with cold and terror," said Madge. "We must keep him till he recovers."

She pushed him quietly back in her chair; and if Miss Priscilla had not been too much dazed with all that was passing round her, she would have seen her hurriedly brush off a broad white mark from her stuff dress where his forehead had rested.

Without another word Madge drew Miss Agatha's own sacred armchair closer to the fire heaped up the peat and coal with a lavish hand; without leave or license asked went to the cupboard where she knew the private stores were kept; with one wrench forced the crazy old lock and brought out a bottle of brandy.

"Madge!" shrieked Miss Priscilla.

"Be quiet," said Madge, turning suddenly upon her with a dark look. "Am I going to let a man die before my eyes for the sake of your meanness?"

"You are good," said the stranger feebly. "May you be rewarded!"

There was something in all this that utterly dominated the sisters; for by this time Miss Agatha had come to her full senses again and was looking on, trembling in every limb. The strange manner in which Madge had assumed the upper hand, and the sudden display of strength, almost of ferocity, that she made, would of itself have scared them; but when to this was added the terror of the passing spectre, and the infinite dread which the stranger inspired, the poor old ladies collapsed and sat there, like exiles in their own house, afraid to remonstrate yet unwilling to acquiesce.

So the time passed till it grew into the night; and still no one stirred. For the last hour no one had spoken. The stranger sat half dozing by the fire,

with just a line of glistening green between his closed eyelids. Madge busied herself in making up a kind of shakedown on the floor, taking no heed of the terrified anguish of the two sisters as she dived into recesses and dragged about, as if they were of no account, the bags and boxes and odd-looking packets, which they knew held their richest deposits. Then, when all was done, she roused the man, and bade him see what she had prepared for him; and, taking the candle, peremptorily bade the old ladies go to bed.

"Go to bed and leave a stranger in the house by himself? No," said Miss Priscilla, despair giving her the momentary semblance of courage.

"You had better," said Madge, fixing her eyes on the spinster; and her look was not pleasant.

"Are you the mistress, or am I?" retorted Priscilla.

"You were; I am," replied Madge. "Now will you go?"

The dozing man opened his eyes a little more. If his big black beard had not covered his mouth, you might have seen it smile, as he whispered very softly to himself: "Bravo, young bulldog!"

"Are you mad, girl?" cried Miss Priscilla, her shrill voice rising to a scream.

"Not now. I was when I came to this old hole,', she answered. "That is not the question, however. Will you go to bed or not?"

"I will not!" said the old lady. "You have no good reason for wishing us to leave this room. Who are you? and why have you brought this man here?"

"Well, if you won't act like a wise woman you must suffer like a fool—like a couple of fools," said Madge quietly. "I wanted to spare you; but you are anxious to be made uncomfortable. Don't blame me, that is all!"

The stranger turned his head; his eyes were wide open now. "Ready, Madge?" he asked lazily.

"Yes, quite ready," she answered. "You won't have much trouble."

In the morning which broke calm and clear, the labourer going to his work passed the house at Three Ash Lane. The door stood wide open and there were strange marks about the threshold; dints of a horse's hoofs, bits of broken pottery, ends and tags of parti-coloured rags. The place looked as if something amiss had happened; and spurred by neighbourly curiosity he knocked at the door; and then, getting no answer, walked in.

Bound in two chairs, and gagged, were the two sisters Sinclair. On the hearth burned still some dying embers; an empty brandy bottle was on the table. The floor was strewn, like the threshold, with fragments of pottery and rags of cloth and linen; and there was not a drawer, a cupboard, a crevice throughout the

house that had not been ransacked. Here and there, among the rubbish on the floor, glittered a golden coin; here and there a silver one. The gain had evidently been heavy when the robbers could afford to leave such spoil.

The man, who had his own griefs too, against the ladies, unfastened their bands and raised them tenderly enough from their chairs. Agatha fell a corpse into his arms; Miss Priscilla was paralyzed and an idiot. All that she could say when she was unbound, was "Galloping Dick;" pointing to the door. But she answered no questions, gave no other clue. Where then, was Madge Bernard—the bonny brown-haired girl who had been pitied many a time by the neighbours when they had met her, so far better than her fate as she seemed to be? The country was soon astir; and the village folk searched far and wide for the missing girl. It was evident that a cruel robbery had been committed; and the honest souls feared even worse things for the only strong and possibly dangerous guardian of the house. She must have made a brave resistance and been punished perhaps by death. They searched for her for days, all through the woods and all over the heath; and turned up one or two spots where they thought the ground looked as if it had been disturbed and where she might have been buried. They found no kind of trace of her however, search

as they might. She had passed into space and darkness, and was never heard of again.

The only persons who could have told of her were a young man and woman sitting in a small coffee-shop in Liverpool, waiting for the moment of embarkation. He was a thickset fair-haired man with a smooth face, small greenish-coloured eyes and a hooked nose. She was a buxom handsome girl with purple-black hair and a skin as dark as a gipsy's—or as walnut-juice. They did not speak to each other; but they both read from the same newspaper the account of a terrible tragedy that had taken place on Maltby Heath, with the evidence of the farmers and others of Galloping Dick having been seen and heard on that dreadful night. Some added their belief that, if the dead could speak, it would be found that the spectre had had more of a hand in the business than folks allowed—evidence however which the coroner pooh-poohed while he dropped a broad hints as to Madge not being dead at all;—and the thing having been planned between her and the ghost. But the young man and woman embarked on board their vessel before those hints were taken up and acted on. And thus the clue to the story was lost and never found again.

They reached Australia in safety; but after such a perilous passage that one old sailor, who came from Devonshire, used to go about the deck muttering: "As

sure as old Nick there's a murderer aboard." Still, bad times pass after a spell; and the bad time of the voyage passed. The ship sailed into harbour substantially none the worse for the unsuspected Jonahs she carried; and the young man and woman invested a good bit of money in a sheep-run and began life fairly enough. They never prospered, however. Things went wrong, first one way and then another; and when the young woman died—and she died, the worn-out drudge of a drunken husband, with a strange black mark on her throat that was never clearly explained away—her last words were, like poor Miss Priscilla Sinclair's: "Galloping Dick." But she added what Miss Priscilla had not: "I have deserved it!"

THE FATE OF MADAME CABANEL.

THE FATE OF MADAME CABANEL.

Progress had not invaded, science had not enlightened, the little hamlet of Pieuvrot, in Brittany. They were a simple, ignorant, superstitious set who lived there, and the luxuries of civilisation were known to them as little as its learning. They toiled hard all the week on the ungrateful soil that yielded them but a bare subsistence in return; they went regularly to mass in the little rock-set chapel on Sundays and saints' days; believed implicitly all that monsieur le curé said to them, and many things which he did not say; and they took all the unknown, not as magnificent, but as diabolical.

The sole link between them and the outside world of mind and progress was Monsieur Jules Cabanel, the proprietor, par excellence, of the place; maire, juge de paix, and all the public functionaries rolled into one. And he sometimes went to Paris whence he returned with a cargo of novelties that excited envy, admiration, or fear, according to the degree of intelligence in those who beheld them.

Monsieur Jules Cabanel was not the most charming man of his class in appearance, but he was generally held to be a good fellow at bottom. A short, thickset, low-browed man, with blue-black hair cropped close like a mat, as was his blue-black beard, inclined to obesity and fond of good living, he had need have some virtues behind the bush to compensate for his want of personal charms. He was not bad, however; he was only common and unlovely.

Up to fifty years of age he had remained the unmarried prize of the surrounding country; but hitherto he had resisted all the overtures made by maternal fowlers, and had kept his liberty and his bachelorhood intact. Perhaps his handsome housekeeper, Adèle, had something to do with his persistent celibacy. They said she had, under their breath as it were, down at la Veuve Prieur's; but no one dared to so much as hint the like to herself. She was a proud, reserved kind of woman; and had strange notions of her own dignity which no one cared to disturb. So, whatever the underhand gossip of the place might be, neither she nor her master got wind of it.

Presently and quite suddenly, Jules Cabanel, who had been for a longer time than usual in Paris, came home with a wife. Adèle had only twenty-four hours' notice to prepare for this strange home-coming; and the task seemed heavy. But she got through it in her

old way of silent determination; arranged the rooms as she knew her master would wish them to be arranged; and even supplemented the usual nice adornments by a voluntary bunch of flowers on the salon table.

"Strange flowers for a bride," said to herself little Jeannette, the goose-girl who was sometimes brought into the house to work, as she noticed heliotrope—called in France "la fleur des veuves"—scarlet poppies, a bunch of belladonna, another of aconite—scarcely, as even ignorant little Jeannette said, flowers of bridal welcome or bridal significance. Nevertheless, they stood where Adèle had placed them; and if Monsieur Cabanel meant anything by the passionate expression of disgust with which he ordered them out of his sight, madame seemed to understand nothing, as she smiled with that vague, half-deprecating look of a person who is assisting at a scene of which the true bearing is not understood.

Madame Cabanel was a foreigner, and an Englishwoman; young, pretty and fair as an angel.

"La beauté du diable," said the Pieuvrotines, with something between a sneer and a shudder; for the words meant with them more than they mean in ordinary use. Swarthy, ill-nourished, low of stature and meagre in frame as they were themselves, they could not understand the plump form, tall figure and fresh complexion of the Englishwoman. Unlike their own experience, it

was therefore more likely to be evil than good. The feeling which had sprung up against her at first sight deepened when it was observed that, although she went to mass with praiseworthy punctuality, she did not know her missal and signed herself à travers. La beauté du diable, in faith!

"Pouf!" said Martin Briolic, the old gravedigger of the little cemetery; "with those red lips of hers, her rose cheeks and her plump shoulders, she looks like a vampire and as if she lived on blood."

He said this one evening down at la Veuve Prieur's; and he said it with an air of conviction that had its weight. For Martin Briolic was reputed the wisest man of the district; not even excepting monsieur le curé who was wise in his own way, which was not Martin's—nor Monsieur Cabanel who was wise in his, which was neither Martin's nor the curé's. He knew all about the weather and the stars, the wild herbs that grew on the plains and the wild shy beasts that eat them; and he had the power of divination and could find where the hidden springs of water lay far down in the earth when he held the baguette in his hand. He knew too, where treasures could be had on Christmas Eve if only you were quick and brave enough to enter the cleft in the rock at the right moment and come out again before too late; and he had seen with his own eyes the White Ladies dancing in the moonlight; and the little imps,

the lutins, playing their prankish gambols by the pit at the edge of the wood. And he had a shrewd suspicion as to who, among those black-hearted men of La Crèche-en-bois—the rival hamlet—was a loup-garou, if ever there was one on the face of the earth—and no one doubted that! He had other powers of a yet more mystic kind; so that Martin Briolic's bad word went for something, if, with the illogical injustice of ill-nature his good went for nothing.

Fanny Campbell, or, as she was now, Madame Cabanel, would have excited no special attention in England, or indeed anywhere but at such a dead-alive, ignorant, and consequently gossiping place as Pieuvrot. She had no romantic secret as her background; and what history she had was commonplace enough, if sorrowful too in its own way. She was simply an orphan and a governess; very young and very poor; whose employers had quarrelled with her and left her stranded in Paris, alone and almost moneyless; and who had married Monsieur Jules Cabanel as the best thing she could do for herself. Loving no one else, she was not difficult to be won by the first man who showed her kindness in her hour of trouble and destitution; and she accepted her middle-aged suitor, who was fitter to be her father than her husband, with a clear conscience and a determination to do her duty cheerfully and faithfully—all without considering herself as a martyr or an

interesting victim sacrificed to the cruelty of circumstances. She did not know however, of the handsome housekeeper Adèle, nor of the housekeeper's little nephew—to whom her master was so kind that he allowed him to live at the Maison Cabanel and had him well taught by the curé. Perhaps if she had she would have thought twice before she put herself under the same roof with a woman who for a bridal bouquet offered her poppies, heliotrope and poison-flowers.

If one had to name the predominant characteristic of Madame Cabanel it would be easiness of temper. You saw it in the round, soft, indolent lines of her face and figure; in her mild blue eyes and placid, unvarying smile; which irritated the more petulant French temperament and especially disgusted Adèle. It seemed almost impossible to make madame angry or even to make her understand when she was insulted, the housekeeper used to say with profound disdain; and, to do the woman justice, she did not spare her endeavours to to enlighten her. But madame accepted all Adèle's haughty reticence and defiant continuance of mistresshood with unwearied sweetness; indeed, she expressed herself gratified that so much trouble was taken off her hands, and that Adèle so kindly took her duties on herself.

The consequence of this placid lazy life, where all her faculties were in a manner asleep, and where she

was enjoying the reaction from her late years of privation and anxiety, was, as might be expected, an increase in physical beauty that made her freshness and good condition still more remarkable. Her lips were redder, her cheeks rosier, her shoulders plumper than ever; but as she waxed, the health of the little hamlet waned, and not the oldest inhabitant remembered so sickly a season, or so many deaths. The master too, suffered slightly; the little Adolphe desperately.

This failure of general health in undrained hamlets is not uncommon in France or in England; neither is the steady and pitiable decline of French children; but Adèle treated it as something out of all the lines of normal experience; and, breaking through her habits of reticence spoke to every one quite fiercely of the strange sickliness that had fallen on Pieuvrot and the Maison Cabanel; and how she believed it was something more than common; while as to her little nephew, she could neither give a name nor find a remedy for the mysterious disease that had attacked him. There were strange things among them, she used to say; and Pieuvrot had never done well since the old times were changed. Jeannette used to notice how she would sit gazing at the English lady, with such a deadly look on her handsome face when she turned from the foreigner's fresh complexion and grand physique to the pale face of the stunted, meagre, fading child. It was a look,

she said afterwards, that used to make her flesh get like ice and creep like worms.

One night Adèle, as if she could bear it no longer, dashed down to where old Martin Briolie lived, to ask him to tell her how it all had come about;—and the remedy.

"Hold, Ma'am Adèle," said Martin, as he shuffled his greasy tarot cards and laid them out in triplets on the table; "there is more in this than one sees. One sees only a poor little child become suddenly sick; that may be, is it not so? and no harm done by man? God sends sickness to us all and makes my trade profitable to me. But the little Adolphe has not been touched by the Good God. I see the will of a wicked woman in this. Hein!" Here he shuffled the cards and laid them out with a kind of eager distraction of manner, his withered hands trembling and his mouth muttering words that Adèle could not catch. "Saint Joseph and all the saints protect us!" he cried; "the foreigner—the English-woman!—she whom they call Madame Cabanel—no rightful madame she!—Ah, misery!"

"Speak, Father Martin! What do you mean!" cried Adèle, grasping his arm. Her black eyes were wild; her arched nostrils dilated; her lips, thin, sinuous, flexible, were pressed tight over her small square teeth. "Tell me in plain words what you would say!"

"Broucolaque!" said Martin in a low voice.

"It is what I believed!" cried Adèle. "It is what I knew. Ah, my Adolphe! woe on the day when the master brought that fair-skinned devil home!"

"Those red lips don't come by nothing, Ma'am Adèle," said Martin nodding his head. "Look at them —they glisten with blood! I said so from the beginning; and the cards, they said so too. I drew 'blood' and a 'bad fair woman' on the evening when the master brought her home, and I said to myself, 'Ha, ha, Martin! you are on the track, my boy—on the track, Martin!'—and, Ma'am Adèle, I have never left it! Broucolaque! that's what the cards say, Ma'am Adèle. Vampire. Watch and see; watch and see; and you'll find that the cards have spoken true."

"And when we have found, Martin?" said Adèle in a hoarse whisper.

The old man shuffled his cards again. "When we have found, Ma'ame Adèle?" he said slowly. "You know the old pit out there by the forest?—the old pit where the lutins run in and out, and where the White Ladies wring the necks of those who come upon them in the moonlight? Perhaps the White Ladies will do as much for the English wife of Monsieur Cabanel; who knows?"

"They may," said Adèle, gloomily.

"Courage, brave woman!" said Martin. "They will."

The only really pretty place about Pieuvrot was the

cemetery. To be sure there was the dark gloomy forest which was grand in its own mysterious way; and there was the broad wide plain where you might wander for a long summer's day and not come to the end of it; but these were scarcely places where a young woman would care to go by herself; and for the rest, the miserable little patches of cultivated ground, which the peasants had snatched from the surrounding waste and where they raised their poor crops, were not very lovely. So Madame Cabanel, who, for all the soft indolence that had invaded her, had the Englishwoman's inborn love for walking and fresh air, haunted the pretty little graveyard a good deal. She had no sentiment connected with it. Of all the dead who laid there in their narrow coffins, she knew none and cared for none; but she liked to see the pretty little flower-beds and the wreaths of immortelles, and the like; the distance too, from her own home was just enough for her; and the view over the plain to the dark belt of forest and the mountains beyond, was fine.

The Pieuvrotines did not understand this. It was inexplicable to them that any one, not out of her mind, should go continually to the cemetery—not on the day of the dead and not to adorn the grave of one she loved—only to sit there and wander among the tombs, looking out on to the plain and the mountains beyond when she was tired.

"It was just like——" The speaker, one Lesouëf, had got so far as this, when he stopped for a word.

He said this down at la Veuve Prieur's, where the hamlet collected nightly to discuss the day's small doings, and where the main theme, ever since she had come among them, three months ago now, had been Madame Cabanel and her foreign ways and her wicked ignorance of her mass-book and her wrong-doings of a mysterious kind generally, interpersed with jesting queries, bandied from one to the other, of how Ma'am Adèle liked it?—and what would become of le petit Adolphe when the rightful heir appeared?—some adding that monsieur was a brave man to shut up two wild cats under the same roof together; and what would become of it in the end? Mischief of a surety.

"Wander about among the tombs just like what, Jean Lesouëf?" said Martin Briolic. Rising, he added in a low but distinct voice, every word falling clear and clean: "I will tell you like what, Lesouëf—like a vampire! La femme Cabanel has red lips and red cheeks; and Ma'am Adèle's little nephew is perishing before your eyes. La femme Cabanel has red lips and red cheeks; and she sits for hours among the tombs. Can you read the riddle, my friends? For me it is as clear as the blessed sun."

"Ha, Father Martin, you have found the word—like a vampire!" said Lesouëf with a shudder.

"Like a vampire!" they all echoed with a groan.

"And I said vampire the first," said Martin Briolic. "Call it to mind I said it from the first."

"Faith! and you did," they answered; "and you said true."

So now the unfriendly feeling that had met and accompanied the young Englishwoman ever since she came to Pieuvrot had drawn to a focus. The seed which Martin and Adèle had dropped so sedulously had at last taken root; and the Pieuvrotines would have been ready to accuse of atheism and immorality any one who had doubted their decision, and had declared that pretty Madame Cabanel was only a young woman with nothing special to do, a naturally fair complexion, superb health—and no vampire at all, sucking the blood of a living child or living among the tombs to make the newly buried her prey.

The little Adolphe grew paler and paler, thinner and thinner; the fierce summer sun told on the half-starved dwellers within those foul mud-huts surrounded by undrained marshes; and Monsieur Jules Cabanel's former solid health followed the law of the rest. The doctor, who lived at Crèche-en-bois, shook his head at the look of things; and said it was grave. When Adèle pressed him to tell her what was the matter with the child and with monsieur, he evaded the question; or gave her a word which she neither understood nor

could pronounce. The truth was, he was a credulous and intensely suspicious man; a viewy man who made theories and then gave himself to the task of finding them true. He had made the theory that Fanny was secretly poisoning both her husband and the child; and though he would not give Adèle a hint of this, he would not set her mind at rest by a definite answer that went on any other line.

As for Monsieur Cabanel, he was a man without imagination and without suspicion; a man to take life easily and not distress himself too much for the fear of wounding others; a selfish man but not a cruel one; a man whose own pleasure was his supreme law and who could not imagine, still less brook, opposition or the want of love and respect for himself. Still, he loved his wife as he had never loved woman before. Coarsely moulded, common-natured as he was, he loved her with what strength and passion of poetry nature had given him: and if the quantity was small, the quality was sincere. But that quality was sorely tried when — now Adèle, now the doctor — hinted mysteriously, the one at diabolical influences, the other at underhand proceedings of which it behoved him to be careful, especially careful what he eat and drank and how it was prepared and by whom; Adèle adding hints about the perfidiousness of Englishwomen and the share which the devil had in fair hair and brilliant

complexions. Love his young wife as he might, this constant dropping of poison was not without some effect. It told much for his steadfastness and loyalty that it should have had only so small effect.

One evening however, when Adèle, in an agony, was kneeling at his feet—madame had gone out for her usual walk—crying: "Why did you leave me for such as she is?—I, who loved you, who was faithful to you, and she, who walks among the graves, who sucks your blood and our child's—she who has only the devil's beauty for her portion and who loves you not?"—something seemed suddenly to touch him with electric force.

"Miserable fool that I was!" he said, resting his head on Adèle's shoulders and weeping. Her heart leapt with joy. Was her reign to be renewed? Was her rival to be dispossessed?

From that evening Monsieur Cabanel's manner changed to his young wife but she was too easy-tempered and unsuspicious to notice anything, or if she did, there was too little depth in her own love for him—it was so much a matter of untroubled friendliness only—that she did not fret, but accepted the coldness and brusqueness that had crept into his manner as good-naturedly as she accepted all things. It would have been wiser if she had cried and made a scene and come to an open fracas with Monsieur Cabanel. They

would have understood each other better; and Frenchmen like the excitement of a quarrel and a reconciliation.

Naturally kind-hearted, Madame Cabanel went much about the village, offering help of various kinds to the sick. But no one among them all, not the very poorest —indeed, the very poorest the least—received her civilly or accepted her aid. If she attempted to touch one of the dying children, the mother, shuddering, withdrew it hastily to her own arms; if she spoke to the adult sick, the wan eyes would look at her with a strange horror and the feeble voice would mutter words in a patois she could not understand. But always came the same word, "broucolaque!"

"How these people hate the English!" she used to think as she turned away, perhaps just a little depressed, but too phlegmatic to let herself be uncomfortable or troubled deeply.

It was the same at home. If she wanted to do any little act of kindness to the child, Adèle passionately refused her. Once she snatched him rudely from her arms, saying as she did so: "Infamous broucolaque! before my very eyes?" And once, when Fanny was troubled about her husband and proposed to make him a cup of beef-tea à l'Anglaise, the doctor looked at her as if he would have looked her through; and Adèle upset the saucepan; saying insolently—but yet hot

tears were in her eyes—"Is it not fast enough for you, madame? Not faster, unless you kill me first!"

To all of which Fanny replied nothing; thinking only that the doctor was very rude to stare so fixedly at her and that Adèle was horribly cross; and what an ill-tempered creature she was; and how unlike an English housekeeper!

But Monsieur Cabanel, when he was told of the little scene, called Fanny to him and said in a more caressing voice than he had used to her of late: "Thou wouldst not hurt me, little wife? It was love and kindness, not wrong, that thou wouldst do?"

"Wrong? What wrong could I do?" answered Fanny, opening her blue eyes wide. "What wrong should I do to my best and only friend?"

"And I am thy friend? thy lover? thy husband? Thou lovest me dear?" said Monsieur Cabanel.

"Dear Jules, who is so dear? who so near?" she said kissing him, while he said fervently:

"God bless thee!"

The next day Monsieur Cabanel was called away on urgent business. He might be absent for two days, he said, but he would try to lessen the time; and the young wife was left alone in the midst of her enemies, without even such slight guard as his presence might prove.

Adèle was out. It was a dark, hot summer's night,

and the little Adolphe had been more feverish and restless than usual all the day. Towards evening he grew worse; and though Jeannette, the goose-girl, had strict commands not to allow madame to touch him, grew frightened at the condition of the boy; and when madame came into the small parlour to offer her assistance, Jeannette gladly abandoned a charge that was too heavy for her and let the lady take him from her arms.

Sitting there with the child in her lap, cooing to him, soothing him by a low, soft nursery song, the paroxysm of his pain seemed to her to pass and it was as if he slept. But in that paroxysm he had bitten both his lip and tongue; and the blood was now oozing from his mouth. He was a pretty boy; and his mortal sickness made him at this moment pathetically lovely. Fanny bent her head and kissed the pale still face;—and the blood that was on his lips was transferred to hers.

While she still bent over him—her woman's heart touched with a mysterious force and prevision of her own future motherhood—Adèle, followed by old Martin and some others of the village, rushed into the room.

"Behold her!" she cried, seizing Fanny by her arm and forcing her face upward by the chin—"behold her in the act! Friends, look at my child—dead, dead in her arms; and she with his blood on her lips! Do you

want more proofs? Vampire that she is, can you deny the evidence of your own senses?"

"No! no!" roared the crowd hoarsely. "She is a vampire—a creature cursed by God and the enemy of man; away with her to the pit! She must die as she has made others to die!"

"Die, as she has made my boy to die!" said Adèle; and more than one who had lost relative or child during the epidemic echoed her words: "Die, as she has made mine to die!"

"What is the meaning of all this?" said Madame Cabanel, rising and facing the crowd with the true courage of an Englishwoman. "What harm have I done to any of you that you should come about me, in the absence of my husband, with these angry looks and insolent words?"

"What harm hast thou done?" cried old Martin, coming close to her. "Sorceress as thou art, thou hast bewitched our good master; and vampire as thou art, thou nourishest thyself on our blood! Have we not proof of that at this very moment? Look at thy mouth—cursed broucolaque; and here lies thy victim, who accuses thee in his death!"

Fanny laughed scornfully. "I cannot condescend to answer such folly," she said lifting her head. "Are you men or children?"

"We are men, madame," said Legros the miller;

"and being men we must protect our weak ones. We have all had our doubts—and who more cause than I, with three little ones taken to heaven before their time?—and now we are convinced."

"Because I have nursed a dying child and done my best to soothe him!" said Madame Cabanel with unconscious pathos.

"No more words!" cried Adèle, dragging her by the arm from which she had never loosed her hold. "To the pit with her, my friends, if you would not see all your children die as mine has died—as our good Legros' have died!"

A kind of shudder shook the crowd; and a groan that sounded in itself a curse burst from them.

"To the pit!" they cried. "Let the demons take their own!"

Quick as thought Adèle pinioned the strong white arms whose shape and beauty had so often maddened her with jealous pain; and before the poor girl could utter more than one cry Legros had placed his brawny hand over her mouth. Though this destruction of a monster was not the murder of a human being in his mind, or in the mind of any there, still they did not care to have their nerves disturbed by cries that sounded so human as Madame Cabanel's. Silent then, and gloomy, that dreadful cortége took its way to the forest, carrying its living load; gagged and helpless

as if it had been a corpse among them. Save with Adèle and old Martin, it was not so much personal animosity as the instinctive self-defence of fear that animated them. They were executioners, not enemies; and the executioners of a more righteous law than that allowed by the national code. But one by one they all dropped off, till their numbers were reduced to six; of whom Legros was one, and Lesouëf, who had lost his only sister, was also one.

The pit was not more than an English mile from the Maison Cabanel. It was a dark and lonesome spot, where not the bravest man of all that assembly would have dared to go alone after nightfall, not even if the curé had been with him; but a multitude gives courage, said old Martin Briolic; and half a dozen stalwart men, led by such a woman as Adèle, were not afraid of even lutins or the White Ladies.

As swiftly as they could for the burden they bore, and all in utter silence, the cortège strode over the moor; one or two of them carrying rude torches; for the night was black and the way was not without its physical dangers. Nearer and nearer they came to the fatal bourn; and heavier grew the weight of their victim. She had long ceased to struggle; and now lay as if dead in the hands of her bearers. But no one spoke of this or of aught else. Not a word was exchanged between them; and more than one, even of

those left, began to doubt whether they had done wisely, and whether they had not better have trusted to the law. Adèle and Martin alone remained firm to the task they had undertaken; and Legros too was sure; but he was weakly and humanly sorrowful for the thing he felt obliged to do. As for Adèle, the woman's jealousy, the mother's anguish and the terror of superstition, had all wrought in her so that she would not have raised a finger to have lightened her victim of one of her pains, or to have found her a woman like herself and no vampire after all.

The way got darker; the distance between them and their place of execution shorter; and at last they reached the border of the pit where this fearful monster, this vampire—poor innocent Fanny Cabanel—was to be thrown. As they lowered her, the light of their torches fell on her face.

"Grand Dieu!" cried Legros, taking off his cap; "she is dead!"

"A vampire cannot die," said Adèle. "It is only an appearance. Ask Father Martin."

"A vampire cannot die unless the evil spirits take her, or she is buried with a stake thrust through her body," said Martin Briolic sententiously.

"I don't like the look of it," said Legros; and so said some others.

They had taken the bandage from the mouth of the

poor girl; and as she lay in the flickering light, her blue eyes half open; and her pale face white with the whiteness of death, a little return of human feeling among them shook them as if the wind had passed over them.

Suddenly they heard the sound of horses' hoofs thundering across the plain. They counted two, four, six; and they were now only four unarmed men, with Martin and Adèle to make up the number. Between the vengeance of man and the power and malice of the wood-demons, their courage faded and their presence of mind deserted them. Legros rushed frantically into the vague darkness of the forest; Lesouëf followed him; the other two fled over the plain, while the horsemen came nearer and nearer. Only Adèle and Martin Briolic stood their ground; Adèle holding the torch high above her head, to show more clearly both herself in her swarthy passion and revenge and the dead body of her victim. She wanted no concealment; she had done her work, and she gloried in it. Then the horsemen came plunging to them—Jules Cabanel the first, followed by the doctor and four gardes champêtres.

"Wretches! murderers!" was all he said, as he flung himself from his horse and raised the pale face to his lips.

"Master," said Adèle; "she deserved to die. She is a vampire and she has killed our child."

"Fool!" cried Jules Cabanel, flinging off her hand. "Oh, my loved wife! thou who did no harm to man or beast, to be murdered now by men who are worse than beasts!"

"She was killing thee," said Adèle. "Ask monsieur le doctor. What ailed the master, monsieur?"

"Do not bring me into this infamy," said the doctor looking up from the dead. "Whatever ailed monsieur, she ought not to be here! You have made yourself her judge and executioner, Adèle, and you must answer for it to the law."

"You say this too, master?" said Adèle.

"I say so too," returned Monsieur Cabanel. "To the law you must answer for the innocent life you have so cruelly taken—you and all the fools and murderers you have joined to you."

"And there is to be no vengeance for our child?"

"Would you revenge yourself on God, woman?" said Monsieur Cabanel sternly.

"And our past years of love, master?"

"Are memories of hate, Adèle," said Monsieur Cabanel, as he turned again to the pale face of his dead wife.

"Then my place is vacant," said Adèle, with a bitter cry. "Ah, my little Adolphe, it is well thou went before!"

"Hold, Ma'am Adèle!" cried Martin.

But before a hand could be stretched out, with one bound, one shriek, she had flung herself into the pit where she had hoped to bury Madame Cabanel; and they heard her body strike the water at the bottom with a dull splash, as of something falling from a great distance.

"They can prove nothing against me, Jean," said old Martin to the garde who held him. "I neither bandaged her mouth nor carried her on my shoulders. I am the gravedigger of Pieuvrot, and, ma foi, you would all do badly, you poor creatures, when you die, without me! I shall have the honour of digging madame's grave, never doubt it; and, Jean," he whispered, "they may talk as they like, those rich aristos who know nothing. She is a vampire, and she shall have a slatte through her body yet! Who knows better than I? If we do not tie her down like this, she will come out of her grave and suck our blood; it is a way these vampires have."

"Silence there!" said the garde commanding the little escort. "To prison with the assassins; and keep their tongues from wagging."

"To prison with martyrs and the public benefactors," retorted old Martin. "So the world rewards its best!"

And in this faith he lived and died as a forçat at Toulon, maintaining to the last that he had done the world a good service by ridding it of a monster who

else would not have left one man in Pieuvrot to perpetuate his name and race. But Legros and also Lesouëf, his companion, doubted gravely of the righteousness of that act of theirs on that dark summer's night in the forest; and though they always maintained that they should not have been punished, because of their good motives, yet they grew in time to disbelieve old Martin Briolic and his wisdom, and to wish that they had let the law take its own course unhelped by them—reserving their strength for the grinding of the hamlet's flour and the mending of the hamlet's sabots—and the leading of a good life according to the teaching of monsieur le curé and the exhortations of their own wives.

WILD AND TAME.

WILD AND TAME.

The Lady Albinia would think of it.

She was a stately lady of a bilious temperament; and disliked precipitation. And if she had required a week to reflect whether she might suffer Mr. Lamplugh to be presented to her without compromising her social dignity, she might surely take an hour to decide on the offer of the hand and heart of the same Mr. Lamplugh, now lying (in writing) before her. True, she had laboured very hard for this result; and had displayed as much cleverness in her tactics as a general besieging a fortress; yet she was fully aware that she was called on for a supreme effort of condescension should she accept it. For, though Mr. Lamplugh was wealthy, while Lady Albinia starved aristocratically on casual help from her friends—and though he was the very ideal of a magnificent-looking man in his prime, while she, in her virgin forty years, had withered rather than ripened—yet she was of the peerage, and Mr. Lamplugh was a commoner of low birth whose ante-

cedents were not particularly favourable even in the eyes of commoners themselves. His father had been in some horrid trade—of course the Lady Albinia did not know what; and he himself had been a merchant somewhere in Jamaica or the Bermudas or Madeira or Russia, my dear. And when there—wherever there might be—he had married some dreadful creature; black most likely; perhaps with a large bore through her under lip or a piece of wood in her ears, or with a nose-ring or flattened head like the monsters one sees in encyclopædias. And this creature had died, thank goodness! and left a family—Lady Albinia wondered if they were black with woolly hair—which family Mr. Lamplugh prudently kept in the country away from civilized life, and which was confessedly a great drawback to his fine fortune and handsome face. But as the Lady Albinia had a decided turn for education, and held strong notions of discipline, the children were not such an obstacle to her. They would be rather occasions for the exercise of her abilities than hindrances to her life; and she congratulated herself more than otherwise on the opportunity of showing to the world what she could do in the way of method and training.

So, allowing herself to subside into the easy-chair, she sat and balanced the two sides of the question with such nicety of weight that she herself wondered if the scale would ever turn.

What could Mr. Lamplugh, that handsome man of fortune, see in the Lady Albinia to tempt him to brave the shame of rejection or the very indefinite good of acceptance? A tall thin spinster of forty and upwards, with an aristocratic nose and a pair of sharp brown eyes, a mouth that was a simple line, the merest indication of eyelashes, and a figure which not all the art of the dressmaker could pad into the semblance of plumpness—what was there in this very uncomfortable and uncompromising lady to lure Mr. Lamplugh into the bondage of matrimony again? It could not be her fortune and it could not be her beauty, for she had neither; while her temper was acid and her mind a blank. Perhaps it was her title; which sounded pleasantly to the ears of the ambitious commoner anxious to reap social consideration from his golden seed; perhaps it was her aristocratic connexions which would help on his own children to distinction. Perhaps he wanted a mother for Daisy, his eldest girl, who would put her into a moral strait-waistcoat and cramp her growth. Lady Albinia was allowed, by all who knew her, to be one of the most admirable correctives for an overflush of youth. Perhaps he had been captivated by her attentions; for Mr. Lamplugh was one of those weak men who are caught by a woman's flattery sooner than by her love. And Lady Albinia had certainly courted and flattered the hand-

some merchant to an extent that might have turned a stronger brain than his, if a stronger brain could have worshipped Debrett as much as he did. Whatever its nature, the secret feeling which prompted Mr. Lamplugh to make this offer was one not easy even for himself to define. He had said nothing to his children, neither had he consulted with his most intimate friend: dreading the "why?" to which he would have been puzzled to fit an answering "because."

Lady Albinia pondered and reflected on this important matter. She looked round her little room. It was very pretty and quite correctly furnished; but all was gift or loan—not an honest inch of independent property was there. Her very dress, so perfect in its arrangement, had been given; and the needleful of Berlin wool with which she caricatured a rose-leaf had been given also. She had but twenty pounds in her purse at this moment to pay her man and her maid and to feed them all until the next loan or gift should come, Heaven knew whence; and this twenty pounds she had received yesterday from one of her titled friends. Her whole life, with all its social circumstances, was mere pauperism; and while she was cited as the pattern of good breeding, the recognized critic and exponent of manners and proprieties, she was liable at any moment to fall from her honourable height and show the world on what sandy foundations the temple of her fame was built.

The Lady Albinia finally settled the diamond ring which she had been screwing over the joint of her marriage-finger until that member was chafed and angry; and opening her dainty desk, began a note which graciously accepted Mr. Lamplugh's offer—though still in a dignified manner—and which promised all maternal cares to his sweet motherless children. She had taken two hours to reflect. A new silk gown would have cost a longer time to choose.

Mr. Lamplugh called the next morning. He kissed her hand, and declared that he was the happiest of men. Not that he looked so; excepting on the principle that extremes meet, and that when men are in the height of rapture it is but logical they should look in the depths of despair. But Lady Albinia did not pay much attention to his looks. She was thinking of the settlements.

They married. Lady Albinia patronized the service and the clergyman; and Mr. Lamplugh, in spite of his fine person and noble carriage, looked inexpressibly humble. And then they set off for the country house where the four Lamplugh children lived, intending to reach it about a week or ten days after their marriage.

This country house, called Todcroft, was in the wildest part of the Lake district. Ambleside was Belgravia and Keswick a very Paris, compared to the primitive simplicity, the wild solitude, the unbroken seclusion, of Todcroft. It stood in the midst of a wood,

far away from every other human habitation; out of the high-road which was on the opposite side of the lake, and about eight miles from the nearest town—which, when reached, boasted nothing more luxurious than country clogs, soled with wood and shod with iron, and round felt hats. The lake and the bold cliffs, the mountains and their rugged crags, the woods, birds, wild flowers and the eternal Heavens, with the magnificent cloud scenery of mountainous districts, were all that the eye had to rest on. Of civilized life not a trace—unless a chance peasant clad in fustian, sheep-dogs barking on the hills and herds of half-wild cattle, might rank as evidences of civilization.

Lady Albinia was obliged to admire the glorious scenery as they droned on, this last day of their wedding journey. But she admired it under a perpetual protest in favour of the Alps and the Pyrenees; appealing to her husband for confirmation of her taste, which, as Mr. Lamplugh had never made the Grand Tour, had a wonderfully exhilarating effect on him; especially when she added: "Oh dear, how stupid of me! One is so much accustomed to men of the world who have travelled through Europe that one forgets when others have not had the same advantages."

As they drove on, by the side of the lake now beneath the crags and woods overhanging the byroad that led to Todcroft, they noticed garlands of wild flowers, heaths

and ferns, festooned across the road; while large bunches of foxglove, mixed with violet-coloured seeding grass, were gathered into bouquets by the wayside.

"What is this? An attempt at rejoicing by your people?" asked the Lady Albinia, pointing with her daintily gloved hand, shaded by the finest lace and manacled at the wrist with gold and rubies.

"The children's welcome to their new mamma!" said Mr. Lamplugh with a little emotion in his voice; for he was not an unaffectionate father.

"How very primitive!" said Lady Albinia with a small laugh. "Quite gipsy art, I declare! We must teach them something better, Mr. Lamplugh, when we get them out of this dreadful place." She shuddered, although the summer sun was shining bright from the deep blue sky and the grass and leaves looked golden in the light.

"Upon my soul that is very pretty!" cried Mr. Lamplugh, startled out of his thraldom for a moment, as they passed a pyramid of which silver bindweed and broad-leaved fern were the base; while the maiden's-hair, with blue-bells jingling, made the summit.

"I hate wild flowers," said Lady Albinia coldly.

"I am afraid you will not find my children agree with you in this," said Mr. Lamplugh, turning his bright blue eyes on her with a cheery look that seemed to ask her to be good-humoured and genial. But his full

loose lips grew weak and timid, and their smile faded gradually away beneath the pinching look of his bride.

"We shall see, Mr. Lamplugh," returned Lady Albinia, more coldly than before. "I am quite prepared for the struggle. On more important points than a love of wild flowers! Your children require teaching and discipline; and shall have both." And she looked capable of keeping her word.

While she spoke, they turned in at the gate leading into the Todcroft grounds where the lodgekeeper and his wife stood, cap in hand, bowing and curtseying. Mr. Lamplugh smiled and waved his hand, calling to them by their names, as he asked after the pigs and the bairns quite naturally and unaffectedly.

"A little cordiality does no harm," he remarked good-humouredly.

"You think not, Mr. Lamplugh? I fear that is rather a dangerous and democratic sentiment."

Lady Albinia said this with the air of a preacher confuting an atheist.

Before he had time to answer, the carriage drove up to the hall door. On the steps stood four young figures. The eldest was a girl of about eighteen or nineteen, the others were her three young brothers. In a badly ironed printed gown, far too short and scanty for the mode, the waist very short and the bodice exceedingly

clumsy—in thick-soled shoes which she yet considered dress (the shoemaker of the little town called them dancing-pumps)—with long black hair hanging to her waist in ringlets which looked as if they had never been cut or turned up—there was not a fashion about Daisy that was not essentially and wholly incorrect. And yet she was beautiful enough to have gained pardon for even a more eccentric costume. Large full eyes, dark as the night and bright as its stars; a pale olive-coloured complexion, with a flood of brilliant crimson on her cheeks; a wide and handsome mouth, broader in the lips and more flexible than Anglo-Saxon mouths; teeth that were like little pearls, small, regular and white; a broad low forehead, a face that was one flush of youth and joy, one laugh of gladness, one bright gleam of innocence and pleasure all over; a loud voice, but clear and cheery, welcoming the new mamma frankly, and crying out: "Dear, dear papa!" as the large but well-formed hands unloosed themselves from the little brother's to clasp the father's neck:—Such a being as this might have struck an open way at once to the heart of any woman not mummified by the world; but she worked no charm in the Lady Albinia who *was* mummified by the world.

My lady only thought her wild and untutored and sadly lacking manners. The three young boys were somewhat like their sister. All had long black hair

falling on their shoulders, bright wild eyes, wide lips that always smiled—all were dark in skin, loud and clear in voice, free in action: all looked foreign, though it would have taken a good ethnologist to say of what race they were.

What was true of the children was true of the place. The garden was a wilderness of flowers and shrubs. Rhododendrons, roses, azaleas, laurels, were all interlaced together, while the flower-beds were a mass of blossoms without order or division. For the first few moments, as she sat there in her London carriage, dressed in her London fashions, all that the Lady Albinia saw was a mass of green leaves and crimson flowers, streaming hair, roving eyes, loud voices and an air of energy and freedom and unchecked life about everything animate or inanimate—from the tangled shrubberies to the big dog barking merrily.

"Good heavens, they are gipsies!" thought the Lady Albinia, shuddering and pressing her scented pocket-handkerchief, heavy with embroidery, against her lips. For she felt almost faint.

Who or what they were, or rather who had been their mother, or what the history of her life, she never rightly understood. Mr. Lamplugh would never speak of his first wife. It was the one sole subject on which he showed any spirit or in which he dared to oppose her. She could only guess that the picture of a beau-

titul girl in Arab costume, standing with her hand across the neck of a white horse, which hung up in Daisy's room, was Daisy's mother. Partly because of the likeness to Daisy and the boys, and partly because of the wild flowers always freshly arranged about the frame, so that it looked framed in flowers—the gilt entirely hidden—and because of the large bouquet like the offering to a shrine on the table beneath. Lady Albinia supposed that all this was some absurd manifestation of savage affection; in which supposition she was perfectly correct. That young Bedouin girl had been the English merchant's wife; the white horse had carried her through the desert to die worn out, on reaching Bagdad—where she herself died of remorse and restraint as much as of disease, after having given birth to those four children. Rather a contrast, this passionate tale of love and beauty and the wild nature pining under the restraints of civilization, to the thorough-bred lady of London society, marrying for money and a settlement!

The Lamplugh children had lived the wildest of lives at Todcroft. Out all day long and sometimes half the summer nights; living in the woods and on the fells and on the lake; Daisy always with her brothers, the boldest rider and the hardiest mountaineer of them all; their food mostly bread, milk and a mess which not every lady in her own right has heard of, called

porridge, with very little meat and vast quantities of fruit and vegetables; scorning all sorts of conventionalities, though the soul of politeness to each other and to all the world, because considerate and unselfish; dressing in the most primitive fashion—Daisy without stays in a round felt hat, thick boots, short petticoats and very rarely gloves;—the boys in anything that came first to hand; quick and clever, but clever in odd out-of-the-way things—clever in natural history, in botany, in biography, and in all artistic tastes; singing beautifully though untaught, but clear and true as wood-birds; drawing with exceeding grace and feeling; knowing nothing of grammar nor of classics nor of arithmetic; Daisy unable to work as well as a charity school-girl but knowing the names of every flower on the fells and fields and the habits of every English bird north of the Tweed;—they had all the elements of vagabonds and artists in them, but not a grain of the stuff that makes up society. They were beings to be loved; but woe to the daring woman who should attempt to "introduce" them! They were most repugnant to the feelings of the Lady Albinia; but she comforted herself by saying that she would soon alter all this.

Daisy was her point of attack. But Daisy was hard to fight and harder to conquer. Good temper that never failed; laughter answering back reproof

because not understanding it as reproof; a wild, free love that could not accept slights or hints, and that kissed away the vinegar even from Lady Albinia's lips;—all this made the instruction and the chastisement of Daisy a difficult matter, even to a person of the Lady Albinia's judgment and experience. Why might she not wander out on the fells with her brothers and Charley Musgrave, their tutor—who by the way was as true a Bedouin as themselves? Because the world did not approve of it? But there was no world here; and what would it have signified to her even if there had been? She did not interfere with the world—why then should the world interfere with her? Why must she wear stays when they hurt her? and shoes that were too small for her feet and too thin for the rocks? Was it not very foolish to give herself a pain in her side with a tight, hard, horrible pair of stays? and to get her feet wet?—besides cutting them with the shingles? That was not wise, surely!—no more than wearing silk gowns that trailed in the mud and caught in the ling and the crags and were spoiled by the rain and the bogs. Why must she turn up her hair? Because she looked like a great girl? But who saw her excepting her brothers, and Charley Musgrave who was like a brother? It was much less trouble to let it hang down naturally. But if mamma liked, it should be

turned up; she did not much care about it. Which was one point gained, thought the Lady Albinia grimly.

To make Daisy wear gloves, fine bonnets and lustrous gowns—to drive out in the carriage like a lady—to submit to be dressed by a maid; or to make her give up her Bedouin habits of roving about the mountains; or to impress her with a sense of her guilt in wearing a wide-awake hat and in rowing on the lake long past midnight—to civilize or tame her, in short, was beyond Lady Albinia; she might as well have talked politics to Daisy's mother the Arab. Daisy stared; looked bewildered; perhaps would burst into a wild laugh; or else she would run up to her stepmother, kiss her gaily, and then rush out of the house and up the mountain side like a goat. Lady Albinia's own maid, one of the finest of that class of fine ladies, said that: "Miss Lamplugh was quite wicked to forget Providence who had placed her in such a high station; and she made bold to speak to her ladyship about it;" tears coming into her virtuous eyes as she did so.

Lady Albinia had a choice of action;—either to leave the Lamplugh children ignominiously to their mountains and their foxgloves, ignoring them for ever after, or to take them by a coup-de-main to London, turn off Charley Musgrave, and begin to mould them in good

earnest into drawing-room exquisites. Mr. Lamplugh consented, when she consulted him—if her haughty wishes, curtly expressed, could be called a consultation. He agreed to her plans, saying also that "Daisy was far too wild; and that indeed they did all need taming down sadly." When the children surrounded him in an uproar of waving arms and passionate voices and big eyes full of tears and lightning, he said: "No, no, my dears, you shall remain here; you shall not go to London." Which had the good effect of pacifying both parties.

Charley Musgrave was the Lady Albinia's pet aversion. It was he who led the way over the steepest crags and who taught them that unfeeling indifference to pain and accidents which horrified the Lady Albinia so inexpressibly. When the eldest boy, Selim, fell and cut his forehead, Charley Musgrave bathed and bound it up; joking all the time, heartless fellow! and telling the child not to cry for it would soon be well again. Such an example to the rest! What would they become if that dreadful young man remained with them? He was more moved though, when Daisy cut her hand with the garden-shears. Indeed, Lady Albinia thought he would have fainted; though Daisy was so unladylike as to laugh and say she was no worse, while the blood was streaming over her short white frock all covered with green moss stains and the juice of wild

berries. But Lady Albinia had sharp eyes; and saw more plainly than most people what blushes and paleness meant. Daisy and Charley Musgrave were put under mental arrest after this; and the lady's vigilance over her prisoners never relaxed.

Lady Albinia expressed her wish one day that Daisy should be "presented." At first Daisy did not quite understand her; when the fact was made clear to her she said not a word, but with the bound of a wounded panther, rushed into her father's study, standing before him flushed and bathed in passionate tears.

"Why, Daisy! what is the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Lamplugh, waking out of a half-doze in something like terror at the storm of passion that burst before him.

"Oh, papa! papa! Mamma says I am to be presented," sobbed Daisy.

"Well, my dear, what then!" said Mr. Lamplugh pleasantly, poor man! and smiling feebly.

"Oh, papa! You promised I should not go to London—you know you did. You said I should not leave Todcroft."

"Hush, my dear; not quite so loud. But if it is good for you, Daisy?"

"It can't be good for any one, papa! That horrible London—where I am to be dressed up like one of those travelling monkeys we have seen here, in feathers and a train!"

"Your mamma is right, Daisy," said Mr. Lamplugh with a sigh; "you are a savage—a true Bedouin."

"I am what my darling mother was, papa, and what I always will remain," cried Daisy.

"Heaven help me!" groaned Mr. Lamplugh. "What a life is mine! I, a quiet man, loving ease above all things, to be the battle-ground between an Arab child and the Lady Albinia!"

And certainly he was to be pitied.

So they all were; Lady Albinia with the rest. For this unconventional atmosphere was just as hateful to her as her stiffness and suppression was foreign to it—though not so hurtful. To the children, the chief harm done was the sense of guilt that was taught them. They, who had never heard of evil, now found that every action of their lives was wrong; and wasted many an hour in tearful perplexity between good and evil—which had all the effect of real sinfulness upon them. Daisy, who had been as free as the winds of heaven, was now followed and watched like a criminal. A strange air of suspicion and wrong was cast round her when she was with Charley Musgrave; an atmosphere of glances, whispers, innuendoes, hints, that she could not understand and that irritated rather than controlled her. Altogether, it was a miserable household.

Unhappiness threw Charley and Daisy more than

ever together; for he too was wretched. An unfettered nature like his could not find much nurture beneath the shadow of Lady Albinia; and, as it never occurred to him to leave the family, he remained and suffered with the rest. By being thrown thus mournfully together, no longer in the innocent freedom of their former life, thoughts and feelings which would not have ripened yet had they lived as of old sprang up into quick maturity; and thus the Lady Albinia only hastened the catastrophe which she wanted to avert. Daisy and Charley Musgrave found out one day that they loved each other; yet not as brother and sister. Hitherto they had lived in the belief that they loved as brother and sister do.

Lady Albinia was horror-struck. Her step-child engaged to a worthless tutor—a man, half artist, half teacher, who had actually to work for his living! It could never be! She flatly told Mr. Lamplugh so; and he, shrugging his shoulders in despair, said despondingly that he would not interfere. He went up to London suddenly, rather basely leaving his aristocratic wife and his wild household to fight out the fight by themselves. The lady was left a clear stage now. Mistress of the family, without even the seeming control of her husband, she would soon make matters conform to her ideas. She would try, at any rate. The morning after Mr. Lamplugh went away, she

called Charley Musgrave into her room. Charley came in his old lounging, careless way, thinking more of a linnet's nest that he had found and wanted to show Daisy, than of the Lady Albinia.

"Mr. Musgrave," began the lady stiffly, but with all her renowned politeness; "I am sorry to be obliged to trouble you with a few unpleasant words."

Charley Musgrave looked up frankly. "Well, Lady Albinia, what is it?"

"You must be aware, Mr. Musgrave, that your proposals for Miss Lamplugh cannot meet with my approbation," said the Lady Albinia, playing with her diamond ring; her finger and thumb hooked together, like a beak.

"Why not, my lady?" he asked, his cheeks rather flushed now.

"Oh, Mr. Musgrave, we need not go into details! It is quite enough to say generally, that the connexion would be undesirable; and that I positively refuse my consent. Most gentlemen would be satisfied with this answer."

"But, Lady Albinia," urged Charley; "when a man's prospects and every hope of happiness are to be blighted, it is but fair to tell him plainly why. To say that the connexion is undesirable is very vague. Have you nothing more definite to urge against me?—my habits, character, principles?"

"Nothing decidedly immoral, Mr. Musgrave; much that I entirely disapprove of."

"As what, my lady?"

"Oh! your freedom, wildness, and—as I consider it—vulgarity. I have always deplored your influence in this household—I confess it frankly—and now I firmly oppose this engagement. Granting that my ideas of good breeding are unnecessarily high for Mr. Lamplugh's children, yet still, Mr. Musgrave, your fortune, your worldly position, would be a sufficient barrier."

"But if Daisy does not object to my poverty?"

"Miss Lamplugh must be guided and controlled."

"And if she will not, Lady Albinia?"

"Mr. Musgrave, she shall."

"Is it, then, open war?"

"No; it is simply a negative warfare. I do not condescend to war with tutors and children;" and the Lady Albinia seated herself with inexpressible disdain. "Of course, Mr. Musgrave," she added after a moment's silence, during which Charley had been doing strict battle with his passionate impulse to defy her to her face; "you will consider this conversation as a sufficient dismissal from your place as tutor to the Master Lamplughs."

He bowed. Poor fellow, he dared not trust his voice now.

"And—it is best to be candid at once—I must forbid any attempt at communication between you and Miss Lamplugh. No letters, messages, interviews—nothing. You must forget each other; without a thought of renewing this absurd affair."

"That, Lady Albinia, I cannot promise. On the contrary, I must hold such communication with Daisy as I can, and as she will grant."

"Then, Mr. Musgrave, I must take my own measures."

"As you will, my lady: I must overcome them."

"Do you threaten me, sir?"

"No, Lady Albinia, I only warn you. You may attempt to separate, but you will never succeed in separating, Daisy and myself. I will find her wherever she may be hidden; and she will be my wife in spite of all your opposition. Do I not know her?—and can I not trust her? You are beating yourself against a rock! Daisy's truth and my love will never yield!" With which words, Charley Musgrave bowed, and walked out of the room.

"We shall see!" said Lady Albinia, with a peculiar flame in her sharp brown eyes. "I do not think I shall be outwitted by a reckless boy and girl."

Tears, vows, prayers, all were unheeded; Charley Musgrave must go. The aristocratic Fate had cut the thread of love and there was no way of help. Daisy's

indignation, fierce and savage as her love was deep, was of no avail. She besought Charley to marry her in the face of her enemies and to allow them no passing moment of triumph. But the tutor had a little more knowledge of the "proprieties;" and told her to wait and be hopeful. Charley Musgrave went away; and poor Daisy was left shipwrecked and alone.

Lady Albinia followed up this first blow by taking Daisy and the boys to London. She and her servants had hard work to keep them together on the road, for they made desperate attempts to escape, and had to be watched like wild birds newly caught. Lady Albinia was twice threatened with arrest by policemen with tender hearts, who could not believe that she had law or right on her side when they saw the distress of her poor prisoners: but her aristocratic nose and perfect manners bore her over all her difficulties, and she arrived in London safely with her charge.

In London, Lady Albinia was the Macgregor with his foot upon his native heath. She was absolute. Not even the ghost of marital authority disturbed her on her throne. The children were well watched; and, in such a wilderness as London these wild foreigners had but little chance against natives to whom the perplexing streets were as familiar as the wild-flowers on the mountains were to them. They had only to submit which they did like tigers in a net—talking Arabic

among themselves, and weeping such passionate tears as might have moved a heart of stone. But a fashionable heart is a very good imitation of stone when the necessity of conforming to conventional moralities is brought into action.

Daisy was tortured. A French staymaker was called in to imprison her figure in a whalebone pillory; then a French dressmaker was called in, and Daisy stumbled over her trailing gowns and tore her lace flounces at every step. Her feet were thrust into narrow-soled boots, and in a short time she had corns; which, besides paining her very much, inexpressibly disgusted her. Her hands were coaxed into gloves which left a deep red mark round her wrists; and she was not allowed to walk—only to drive out in an open carriage with her stepmother. Charley Musgrave's letters were intercepted; the sharp brown eyes read them first and then the beak-like fingers burnt them in the fire; so, as Daisy was too innocent to know of post-offices and false addresses and could not have managed a clandestine correspondence, even if she had known how, she could do nothing but hope and wonder and love and trust. She knew that Charley was faithful, she said; and she believed in him as passionately as she mourned for him.

But the poor child began to fade. She had a fixed pain in her side, a feverish flush on her cheek, a cough,

and a wild wandering look in her bright eyes that reminded Mr. Lamplugh of the young mother who had died ten years ago, in his arms. She was weaker too: and her old restless energy was quite subdued. All she did was to sit by the window looking into the park; tears filling up her hollow eyes, and her trembling lips repeating songs in Arabic—all about the captive and his love, the desert and sweet liberty.

Mr. Lamplugh, frightened into manhood by the sight of his pride and darling drooping at his feet, sent for the family physician; luckily a kind and skilful man. A glance at the Bedouin child told him the whole secret of her malady. She was dying, he said bluntly, of restraint. She must just go back to Todcroft, to her wild life of freedom again, if they wished to save her.

"And, oh, papa!" sobbed Daisy, clasping her thin hands together. "Give me back my brothers and Charley again!"

"Aye," said the doctor. "Miss Daisy had better be married to Charley, I think; and the young gentlemen had better go back to their old home too. You see, Mr. Lamplugh, blood is stronger than breeding; and Lady Albinia would scarcely have tamed these Arab natures if she had had them from the cradle. She had better give up the attempt, as it is. You want generations, not individuals, for educational successes. Let Lady Albinia adopt some Saxon child if she wants to prove

some Saxon theory. The only truth she will prove with these children, is, that Bedouins don't make good followers of fashion, and that nature is stronger than the artificial rules and restraints of society."

And the doctor's advice was followed.

END OF VOL. II.

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